

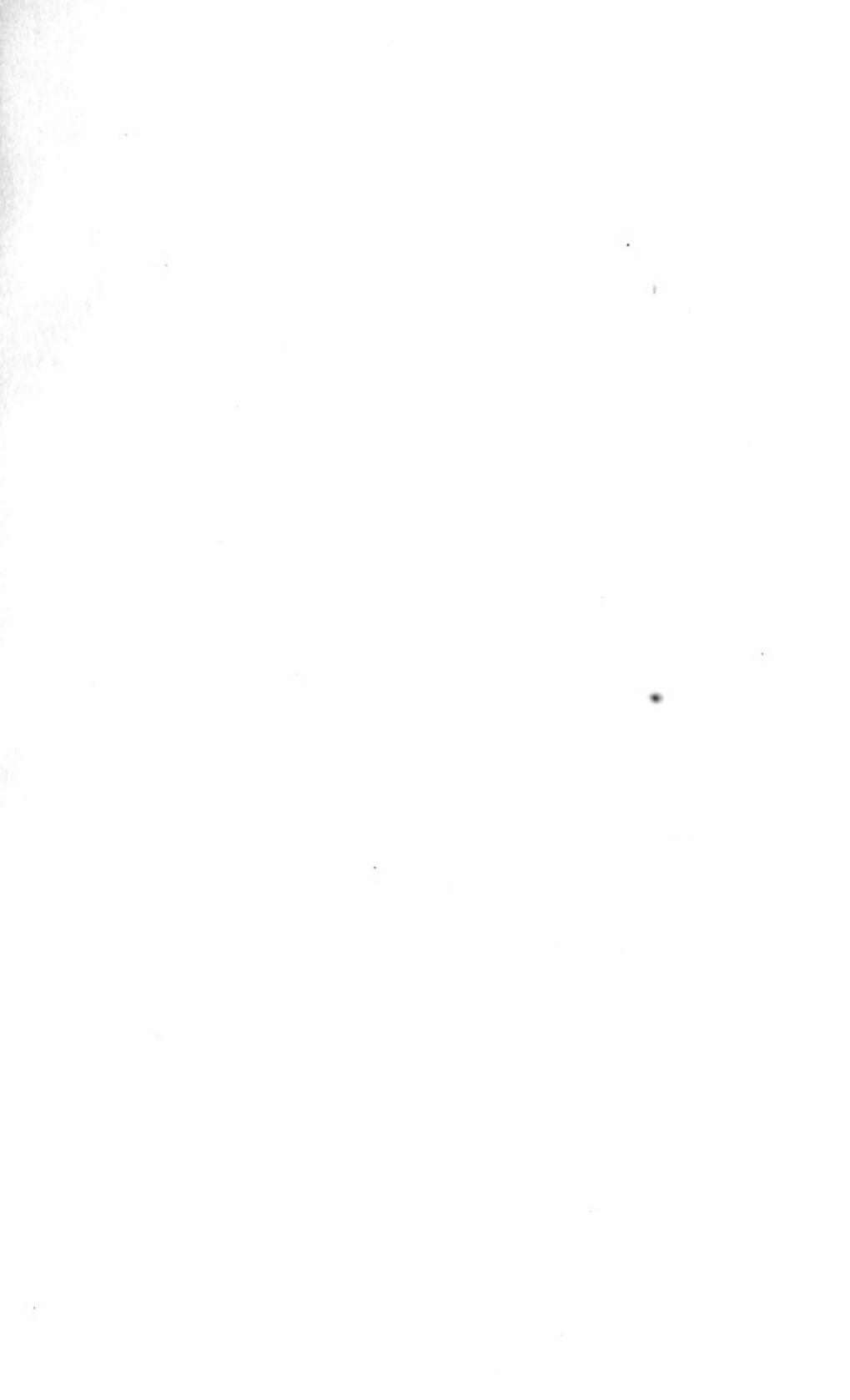
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B R I D G E T.

VOL. III.



B R I D G E T.

BY

M. BETHAM-EDWARDS,

AUTHOR OF

“KITTY,” “DOCTOR JACOB,” “FELICIA,”
“A WINTER WITH THE SWALLOWS,”

&c., &c.

“Aux plus desherités, le plus d'amour.”

Guépin, of Nantes.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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B R I D G E T.

CHAPTER I.

LYING IN WAIT FOR HELWYSE.

THERE followed such a persistent lying in wait for Helwyse on the part of Mr. Starffe and Freeland, that in good Mrs. Bray's language—"had it been otherwise, and a queer-looking gentleman lodger who was in foreign parts instead of Miss Helwyse, and two detectives in private clothes a-prying about the premises, she should never have slept in her bed." But she accounted for the anxiety to see Helwyse on other and more tranquillizing grounds:

"You see," she said to her relation and

confidant, the greengrocer, “Miss Helwyse keeps carriage company now-a-days, and visits amongst the nobility and that, and I’ll bet you a new pair of snuffers it’s Her Majesty herself who wants to see her as soon as she gets home. But I, for one, am for America and every man his own master, and it isn’t Lords and Ladies who’ll make Miss Helwyse’s fortune, but the talents God has given her.” Be this as it may, the good woman was naturally dying with inquisitiveness to know what brought Mr. Starffe and Mr. Freeland so regularly every morning and evening, and what made them go so disappointedly away. That Helwyse did not return exactly when expected seemed to Mrs. Bray a misfortune alone requiring a considerable amount of Christian fortitude.

“No,” she said, when, for the fourth time, the curate made his appearance.

“No, sir, never as long as I live will I put flesh, fish or fowl into the pot without being sure to a moment, by Westminster clock, when it will be swallowed. Miss Helwyse is a sweet young lady, and I love her as my own, who was buried on her eighteenth birthday, twenty years ago come next May ; but if mutton-chops at a shilling a pound, and cooked to a turn to fill just anybody’s stomach who happens to be handy, don’t try a Christian woman, nothing will——”

“Well, well,” answered the curate, feeling it his duty to put in a scriptural phrase. “Remember Martha, who was troubled about many things ; and do you, like Mary, choose the better part. These are small misfortunes.”

“Not to womenfolk, sir—I beg pardon, and I always say, sir, there ought to be two Catechisms and two sets of Command-

ments, one for those who cooks victuals and the other for those who eats 'em—for males and females, I mean. Now there's mashed potatoes—a trifle to a gentleman like you, but not to me, who knows the price and the job it is to get them floury, and I assure you, sir, not another dish will I prepare till I see Miss Helwyse ready to sit down to it with my own eyes——”

“That will be prudent; but she will surely arrive to-morrow morning. What does Mr. Freeland say?”

“Mr. Freeland, sir, is one of those men who never says anything. It isn't *his* tongue that will witness against him on the Judgment Day.”

“Then he has heard nothing, I suppose?”

“To be sure not, sir, or I'm sure he'd

be the first to put me out of my misery, for he's the softest-hearted man alive, and wouldn't kill a fly, even if it lighted on the tip of his nose——”

“Well, I will look in again to-morrow morning,” said the poor curate, looking sadly down-hearted. “Thank you kindly, ma'am, for your information.” And then he took his weary way back to Hornsey. It was a long journey to make so often, and the time could be ill spared from the curate's other duties; the expense, too, was something to a man who already discharged various fixed, as well as floating benevolences, out of the narrowest means. All these sacrifices, and more, he was willing to make a dozen times over for Helwyse's sweet sake ; but what if they were made in vain? The allotted period was drawing terribly near, and all expedients

resorted to had as yet failed. If Helwyse did not return in time, the dreaded threat would be carried into execution, and ruin and disgrace would overwhelm the little household at Hornsey Rise. No wonder, as he thought of these things, the curate found his homeward journey long and dreary.

And next morning the situation was not changed. Helwyse had neither come nor written. Autumn gales were blowing in the Channel, so that her return seemed more problematic than ever, and meantime, the fatal moment was drawing very near. What can be done, thought poor Mr. Starffe despairingly, as he recalled Bryan's careworn looks, Emilia's tears, and the general dismay and disorder reigning in the home, once so tranquil and joyous. With a saddened countenance and a step that dragged heavily,

he was turning homewards for the seventh time since that anxious lying in wait for Helwyse had begun, when he encountered Freeland hastening to meet him.

"I felt sure I should catch you, sir," he said, and then, without apology, turned back to accompany him to the station.

"I fear you have no news for me?" asked the curate. "Miss Helwyse has not written?"

"No. That is exactly why I wanted to meet you to-day. I think perhaps these gales may delay her return some days longer. Indeed, there is so much uncertainty about Miss Fleming's movements at all times, that I think we ought to act in the matter without any reference to her whatever."

"Alas! what is to be done? Where are we to turn for the large sum of money

that is needed ? I can only furnish a third, and you do not know the nature of these people into whose clutches poor Fleming has fallen, Mr. Freeland. They would suck the life-blood out of an honest man, rather than forfeit a penny of their unrighteous gains ! They will have the whole, or nothing, and if it is not forthcoming by eight o'clock to-night, our poor friend will be sold out of house and home!"

" You say you can furnish a third of the money," Freeland continued eagerly. " I will tell you, then, what is to be done. I have a little store in the bank, and rather than have any harm happen to kith or kin of Miss Fleming's, I would take it all out to-morrow, even if I were sure of never seeing it again. But I lend it merely for the time—that is to say, a friend lends it—for I must beg of you on no account to mention my name in the

matter—and when Miss Fleming comes back, she and her brother can repay the loan to you. This seems the only way of getting out of the difficulty."

"God bless you, my dear sir," cried the enraptured Starffe, with tears of joy and gratitude running down his cheeks. "That is acting like a true friend and Christian gentleman indeed! And how grateful our sweet friend will be to you." He was so much overcome by Freeland's liberality, that he had quite forgotten the condition.

"But Miss Fleming is to know nothing about it," Freeland answered, almost impatiently. "I could not, under any circumstances, openly come forward at such a time. You can easily understand the reason why."

Then, seeing Mr. Starffe's unenlightened look, he added, with mixed pride and humility, dignity and self-abasement,

“ You forget, sir, that I should be presumptuous in acting as you or any other friend of Miss Fleming’s might do. I am only her friend on sufferance, perhaps, I ought rather to say, by courtesy ;” and he smiled bitterly as he spoke.

“ But Miss Helwyse, I am convinced, does not feel the distinction,” said the curate.

“ It is nevertheless there,” Freeland answered in the same voice.

“ Yes, perhaps, in the eyes of the common herd,” continued the irrepressible Mr. Starffe, quite unconscious of his companion’s irresponsive looks ; “ but never of the select few, and, I need not add, of Miss Helwyse. She always speaks of you as of one of her best, most valued friends ; and she has not a particle of pride or worldliness, I am sure, in her composition. Does she ever let you feel that there

is any difference—we will say between your position and mine, or your position and Mr. Kingsbury's, for instance? I met you both in the studio one day once, do you remember, and she asked your opinion, and talked to you, and shook hands with you when you went away—in fact, treated you both precisely alike?"

This was too much for Freeland's patience. He liked Mr. Starffe's company well enough—he had felt inclined to talk of Helwyse half an hour ago—but these well-meant apologies and explanations tried him past endurance. There was no alternative but to cut the conversation short, and take his leave.

"I am sorry that I cannot accompany you any further," he said, "but, before going, I should be glad of a few more particulars."

"I trust I have said nothing to wound

your feelings, my dear sir," said the curate, in a self-reproachful voice. " You know, I think the wisest and the humblest of us are apt sometimes to imagine unintended slights and affronts ; and Miss Helwyse is placed in a peculiarly delicate position with regard to you."

" Would you mind telling me a little more about the money ? " Freeland put in.

" Certainly, certainly—only don't let your mind dwell on those distinctions you speak of. Miss Fleming is the last person in the world to pay any attention to them."

" Of course—what did you say was the exact sum ? "

" True, to come to business. Pray forgive me for being a little discursive. You see, I entertain so sincere an admiration for Miss Helwyse, and so sincere a respect for yourself, that—"

" Two hundred, thirty-three pounds, and odd shillings, I think ? "

“ Exactly. Two hundred, thirty-three pounds, seven shillings, and ninepence. But just permit me to observe that I am quite sure, as far as Miss Fleming is concerned, no unpleasantness would arise, even if your name did transpire——”

“ And it must be forthcoming by to-night?”

“ Just so. And though, of course, I will not enlighten Miss Helwyse against your wish, you can make your mind easy as to her feelings on the subject.”

“ Thank you, I must really go now. You may rely on my help if Miss Fleming does not return in time; but on the conditions I mentioned.”

“ Of course. I accept on any conditions. Beggars must not be choosers, you know,” cried the curate, gratefully; and then they separated.

Mr. Starffe to hasten home and get through his parochial work as fast as he

could, and so make up for the time spent in running backwards and forwards to Kensington, Freeland to set off for the city, and there take the necessary steps concerning the funds required. It still thrilled him with exquisite happiness to feel that he was serving Helwyse. Hope had vanished long ago, and with it that indescribable joy in her presence, and pride in her beauty, that had made their daily intercourse a sweet and sacred thing. Yet he felt glad that this opportunity had come.

He was a very proud man, and when he had made up his mind to follow a line of conduct or duty, would do it unswervingly at any cost. Once convinced of her love for another, of the subordinate place he held in her life, no self-sacrifice or suffering was held worthy of comparison with her happiness, her severity, her smooth, rounded, artistic existence. His passion for Helwyse should never cause her a mo-

mentary uneasiness, much less a pang of self-reproach. She should never know how he had loved her, and when she needed him no longer, he would quietly drop out of her life altogether. Whilst the boy was with him, this could not be, but the time was drawing near when even Ambrose would need him no longer, and there would not be that excuse for the friendly intercourse, once so delicious, now so bitterly painful, yet a pleasure clung to, clutched at desperately, feverishly.

It was not one thing, but many, that had gradually lifted the veil from Freeland's eyes, and had made him realize how little he was to her after all. When people talked of Kingsbury's admiration for the beautiful young artist, and when the report of an engagement as likely to take place between them gradually took shape, he still hoped on, or rather, struggled to hope on. He had said to him-

self that the lists were open for Arthur Freeland no less than for Edward Kingsbury, that he might break a lance for this sweet prize with him as well as any other. So he had gone on, wavering between hope and despair, exultation and disappointment, till he realised at last with his own eyes that, however much Helwyse might esteem him as a friend, her maiden fancy was already given to another. A blind man must have found out thus much, for there were tones of her voice that belonged to Kingsbury, and no one else, glad little utterances, intended for his ears only, a dozen signs of preference the least observant might detect. Helwyse, joyous ever, was doubly joyous whenever Kingsbury was by. There were dresses and ornaments she wore that seemed to belong to him, so entirely were they worn in honour of his visits. His least little word of praise or approbation made her blush and smile with joy.

But Freeland's company, Freeland's devotion, Freeland's blame or approval were taken as a matter of course, and whenever she thanked him for a service, it was done without a blush or a pause for the right word. Must he not have been more than blind not to see all this? And when it was bruited abroad that at last Kingsbury's fastidious taste was satisfied, and that some kind of tacit understanding existed between the two artists, did not everything point to the same conclusion? Not even Kingsbury's intimate friends, nor Helwyse's either, knew more than the world on this subject. People talked and commented, but no one had any reason, except for those already stated, to link their names together. Helwyse and Kingsbury had ever been the best friends; much of her success was imputed to his guidance, help, and inspiration. She was said to be

the only woman-artist of the day whose genius he believed in. But it was possible that, after all, people were deceiving themselves in imputing to him a tenderer feeling.

Still the opposite conclusion was the natural one, and, as far as Freeland's observation went, Helwyse was as remote from him now as she could well be. She might not have given any promise to Kingsbury; there could hardly be any doubt that she had given him her preference. And then she was already winning both fame and fortune, and these things were of a nature to separate Freeland from her more and more. She was not changed from her former self. She would never be spoiled by the favour or flattery of the world, he said; and very likely, in spite of her own wishes, she was drifting farther and farther from her old life, living more

and more in and for the world. In fact, Helwyse Fleming, the sweet girl-artist, who had brought with her such gifts, such eyes, and such ingenuousness from her native Ireland, was just now the fashion. Without absolute incivility she could not have kept the fashionable world from her doors —and at five-and-twenty was it natural that she should be uncivil? Freeland seldom blamed her for accepting all the homage laid at her feet. Worthless or not, it meant something, and he was as proud of her success, so called, as poor Bryan. But, above all, it meant that henceforth Arthur Freeland was the loneliest man in all the world. No wonder that he took refuge in that proud, uncompromising reserve the curate had found so difficult to understand! Whatever it might cost him, he was determined to keep his secret.

CHAPTER II.

TALK IN A RAILWAY-CARRIAGE.

AND where was Helwyse all this time? At the very moment her friends at home were conferring so eagerly on the probabilities of her return, she was breakfasting with her travelling companions at Dover. They had arrived the night before, and were to proceed to London that afternoon, after six months' absence in Italy and Switzerland. Mr. Cornwell had joined the party in Paris for a few days only, but the rest, consisting of Kingsbury, Mrs. Cornwell, and two or three other friends, had spent the greater part

of the time together. What a merry breakfast it was, and how delightful were those reminiscences of travel just accomplished!—the spring in Rome and Venice, the summer in Tyrol, the autumn on Lake Como and among the Swiss mountains. They had sketched, studied, sunned themselves from morning till night, and were returning home, bronzed and beautified by the southern sun, freshened and inspired by a thousand novel and pleasant experiences. Travel in such a case is not merely a rushing to and fro in railways, a choice, more or less, of so many hotels or “sights,” but a new life, a bright page added to the inner existence, a garden of memory to belong to us henceforth and for ever.

Helwyse, looking fresh as a rose, and perhaps the happiest of all, was nevertheless a little silent, a little pensive now and then.

None had reaped goldener harvests than she, whether of mere pleasure, intellectual enjoyment, or artistic inspiration ; none looked forward with more hope and delight to the working days to come. How rich, how abundantly dowered, how happy she felt ! How good the past had been, how radiant was the future to look forward to !

Yet so intimately connected are our deepest joys and sorrows, and so often do they follow one on the heels of another, that Helwyse, trembling, asked herself whether, indeed, it could be so, whether she was but deluding herself that the ordinary portion of mixed good and evil was not in store for her as for others.

Have we not all had some such experience ? We may deserve more or less of happiness or we may not, but when it comes in excess, when the cup of joy, filled to overflowing, is held to our lips, do

not our hands tremble and our hearts sink within us lest, at the last moment, the coveted potion be dashed to the ground for ever?

Alas ! we learn later that we may safely accept whatever the gods bestow, that no matter how abundant their gifts, they are sure to take away as much, that alike to the best and to the worst of us, good fortune does not come alone.

Helwyse could not have put her apprehensions into words. Perhaps she would have smiled deprecatingly had anyone suggested them, but she was a little uneasy. She felt afraid of the very intensity of life that made it so well worth having. She accused herself of growing egotistical, at least self-absorbed in the vivid, many-sided aspect existence had lately assumed.

And, as was only natural to her in such

a state of mind, she began reproaching herself for fancied remissness, and for having been wanting in sisterly duty to Bryan, and in friendliness to Freeland. She had seldom written to either during those few bright months of travel, she had heard from them seldomer still, and perhaps it was her own fault that now, on her homeward journey, a little care would take possession of her now and then. Were they all well, Bryan and Emilia and the children, Freeland and Ambrose? Had she done right in leaving the boy so long?

These, however, were but passing clouds, soon dissipated by a little talk with Kingsbury about projected pictures, a little chat with Mrs. Cornwell about common things, and lastly, the railway journey to London. Nothing sooner dissipates idle care than swift locomotion, and no sooner was

she placed opposite Kingsbury in a first-class railway carriage, than she forgot to torment herself concerning fancied shortcomings, or the perplexities of human destiny in general.

“How delightful to have been away, how much more delightful to be back again!” Kingsbury said. “I think you and I both feel the same on that point, Miss Fleming!”

“Yes, indeed;” then closing her eyes with a little sigh of contentment, she added, “There is nothing like a studio to make one in love with life.”

“A studio without our own pictures in it! And when may I come and see you, and talk over your Academy subjects?

Of course Helwyse let him fix his own time, and from one topic they went on to another, till they chanced to talk of Papillon.

"There is the happiest man I know," Kingsbury said. "Yet he is never serious about anything."

"Except once, about my poor Bridget," Helwyse answered, with a smile. "He really took a great deal of pains at Beechholme Park to teach her arithmetic."

"What an odd freak! And Miss Bridget, what has become of her? She promised to grow into a beauty."

"She is still at my brother's. Mrs. Cornwell offered to take her on this journey with Rosie, but she refused to leave her little brother."

"And the young gentlemen, how many of them are there in all? Seven, if I remember rightly."

"No, indeed," Helwyse said, laughing merrily. "When Ambrose says, 'Seven in all are we,' he includes his three sisters by adoption, my brother Bryan's little

girls. There is Bridget, Patrick, the eldest of the boys; Ambrose, Mr. Freeland's pupil, whom you know, just leaving school; and Hilary, the little one."

Kingsbury listened with that mild expression of horror he always wore when talking of what he called the juvenile invasion, but Helwyse, not noticing it, chatted on about Bridget and the boys. Patrick was apprenticed to a land-surveyor, Freeland spoke well of Ambrose's abilities, Bridget was growing handsomer and taller than ever, little Hilary was a universal favourite, and so on. She was far from divining what was in her hearer's mind as he listened, and she naturally believed that his interest in her family arose from a stronger interest in herself.

"I wonder if Freeland would go out to India?" Kingsbury asked, after a time.

"I hope not," Helwyse cried, with a

look of dismay. “What made you think of such a thing?”

“I should be as sorry to lose him as anyone, but I am thinking of his own prospects and advantage. There is a project—very much in the clouds at present, but almost sure, I think, to be matured, and ultimately carried into execution—of sending out a competent staff of draughtsmen and designers to copy the most important works of Indian art in Delhi and other ancient cities. I have every reason to believe that Freeland could get appointed to the commission if he authorized me to use my influence. It is a Government affair—one, of course, entailing great expense, and also high pay.”

“I do not think Mr. Freeland cares much about money.”

“No, he may be indifferent to that side of the question, but there are other con-

siderations. A man who should undertake the leadership of such an enterprise, and carry it out as Freeland could and would do, is sure of winning the kind of recompense he does value. He would be distinguished ever after as a public benefactor, would have the satisfaction of having achieved most important work, and would henceforth take the place in society he deserves."

"Ah! I had not thought of all these things. I hope, for his own sake, he will accept, though I should miss him sadly, and Ambrose too."

"He could take Ambrose with him, and better fortune could not happen to the boy either. You see," Kingsbury went on eagerly, "the whole thing is so novel, so interesting, and so exactly suited to an artistic mind like Freeland's, that I can hardly fancy he would hesitate for a mo-

ment, and there is no reason whatever for leaving his pupil behind. I speak in the public interest more than in Freeland's, after all. Where could we find another like him?"

"True; I should be very glad and very sorry," Helwyse said.

"We should fare badly for picture-frames till we got him back again," answered the artist, far from measuring her regret; then he added, by way of consolation, and smiling upon her as he spoke with that expression of unqualified approval she found so encouraging—"In that case you must let me design your picture-frames for you instead."

What could Helwyse say but smile and blush by way of answer? They talked much about Freeland, but more about themselves, and the journey seemed far

too short, though they were travelling by a slow train. Kingsbury found a dozen little opportunities of expressing his pleasure in her achievements, her company, her conversation, everything belonging to her, and as their travelling companions drowsed over their newspapers, they could talk unrestrainedly.

When a pause came, and a mood of thoughtfulness stole over both, it was none the less pleasant. What should they be thinking about except each other? Perhaps they did not realise this thought, but no one observing them would have doubted that such was the case.

Yet with all this interchanged sympathy, friendship, and comradeship, not a word had been said by the artist to compromise such agreeable relations. His admiration and interest, moreover, might

have fairly passed without comment in a man so many years older than his pupil and admiring disciple. He had never breathed a word that could warrant the general report of a deeper feeling on his side. If people chose to draw their own conclusions to the contrary, that was their affair ; but as far as word of mouth was concerned, Helwyse was still free.

How it was so, could even Kingsbury have explained to himself ? To-day, for instance, they had been constantly thrown together, and if he wanted to say the word that would bind or loose for ever, opportunity had been amply afforded. Moreover, the human mind is never more disposed towards making an important decision than after a long journey. We have escaped perils, we have enjoyed pleasures, we have received new impressions, have been made wiser by new experiences ;

what more inclines us to take an irrevocable step to bind ourselves by an indissoluble tie, to undertake new responsibilities, than the frame of mind induced by this mingled retrospection and looking forward? It seems as if so large a portion of existence has glided away amid the shifting scenes we have left behind, that we must straightway begin to economise alike time and enjoyment for the future. We are in a hurry to make up for carelessly spent hours, errant fancies, wandering habits, and would fain erect our little tent and settle under its roof for ever and ever.

Kingsbury was the last man in the world to make haste about anything. He was accustomed to be waited for on all occasions like a sovereign, to do things in a royal, leisurely way, and never find himself too late. And then his life had been hitherto so perfect, so well put together,

if we may use the word, that he was terribly afraid of undoing all by an injudicious touch. The whole structure might fall to pieces, or be disfigured in the eyes of the world, or, at least, incur some slight blemish. Now was a time to pause, to reflect, to weigh the consequences. He said to himself that if ever a man was truly in love with a woman, he was in love with Helwyse ; but that love must not be “ lord of all ” in an entirely well-ordered, nicely balanced life. He had, perhaps, quite made up his mind that he would speak to Helwyse on this last railway journey, and certainly opportunity was not wanting. Their travelling companions were soon fast asleep, the train did not move so rapidly as to prevent conversation, and when he bent down to indicate some point in the fleeting landscape, their faces almost touched. What easier than to whisper the word she

must have understood, no matter how softly uttered? The little he had to say could have been said a thousand times, and he had started feeling sure that it would be said, before they reached their destination. Yet the train sped nearer and nearer to London, and he still talked of the scenes they were passing through, by-gone journeys, pictures, books, and the weather.

Why was it so? He could hardly have answered.

"Well," said Mrs. Cornwell to her husband, as the two drove in their snug little brougham to Kensington, "I must say, in one respect, our much vaunted journey has proved a decided failure."

"And what is that? As far as I am concerned, travelling is always a failure. What a comfort to have a glass of decent sherry, and a slice of sirloin to-night!"

"I was not thinking of sherry or sirloins, but of something much more important. Harry, I have quite lost patience with Mr. Kingsbury."

"I thought you had done that long ago, my dear."

"But I could not suppose he would never make up his mind at all. In London, it is, I know, very difficult for people to find time to make up their minds, but one would think it easy enough in Venice or Switzerland! Think of the mountains they have climbed together, the gondolas they have glided in, the picture-galleries they have visited. It is a great disappointment to me."

"I cannot conceive why it should be. People never marry to please their friends."

"I want her to marry and settle down for her own sake, and who so fitted for her

in every respect as Mr. Kingsbury? Besides, he has certainly paid her more attention than he ought to do, if he means to marry some one else."

"She must be the best judge of that."

"But I think Helwyse likes him. I feel sure of it."

"Well, that does not alter the matter. You see, my dear, she may like him, or she may not—very probably she does—but, in his case, it may be a matter of mere friendship, you know. They have known each other so long, he has been so helpful to her in every way. They have been so much thrown together, that it is quite possible their liking means friendship, and nothing more. If he asked her to marry him, she might say yes on the strength of this liking, but if he does not, do not take it for granted that Kingsbury has behaved badly, and that Helwyse will break her heart."

"She will not do that, but he would have behaved badly all the same."

"I do not see it. But here we are, thank God, and I for one am not sorry to be home again. I never felt so disposed to dine in my life!"

CHAPTER III.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

HELWYSE quitted her friends at the railway station, and drove towards Kensington alone, with a radiant face. She was not troubling herself about fancied shortcomings or excess of happiness any longer. Alike misgiving and apprehension had passed away, leaving her with a light heart and a mind at ease. Far from feeling the uncertainty her friend so much bewailed as a burden, she rather dreaded anything that should come in the shape of change, even were it added happiness. She thought she wanted nothing except to have Kingsbury for her friend, to see him

often, to feel that her presence pleased him, to strive to attain those artistic standards he was always holding before her. Why should she desire any change in relations so perfect, in a life so rich, so dowered above her poor deserts?

How impatient she felt to see her working-room once more, to begin the pictures she had so often talked over with him, to garner the golden harvests they had reaped together! Her first homecoming from Italy two years and a half ago was not nearly so rich in hopes or memories as this, for then they had not travelled in company. Now they had the same pleasures to look back upon, the same recollections to idealize, the same intellectual stores to turn to account, and she felt sure that they should see each other very often. That was what she

cared most about. She wanted Kingsbury's presence more than ever, she had become so used to it that she felt a blank when he was not by.

Thus Helwyse explained things to herself as she drove home that dusky October afternoon. The sun still struggled feebly with the mist, and the dreariest part of autumn had not yet come. But what a change after the sky and foliage of the the South! The parks were barren, a few rusty leaves still lingering on the trees, a few pale flowers still blooming on the walks, and that was all that was left of the summer, still lingering so goldenly in the Swiss valleys and Italian vineyards left behind.

But what were these things to Helwyse? She hardly noticed them. She was in that frame of mind when even the London

climate does not much matter. She scarcely knew whether the sun was shining or not.

It happened that just as her cab turned the corner of her own street, she caught sight of Mr. Starffe's lank figure hastening on before in the same direction. The incident struck her as being unusual, yet he was so friendly, and had more than once come to Kensington on unimportant errands before, that it gave her no alarm. He stopped at the gate of her home, looked at the cab narrowly as it approached, then, assuring himself that it was indeed Helwyse, hastened to open the door, with an expression of mingled relief and concern.

"I hope all are well at Hornsey?" were her first words.

"Yes," Mr. Starffe stammered, beginning to realise the difficulty of his mission.
"Nobody is ill, I assure you."

"Is anything the matter?" she asked, with a startled air, for the curate, having handed her out of the cab, stood by, looking strangely helpless and miserable.

"Everybody is in excellent health. Pray do not be alarmed, dear Miss Fleming. It is only—but come inside. I beg you—"

"I am sure something must have happened to poor Bryan, Emilia, or the children," Helwyse said, turning red and pale, and trembling from head to foot.

"It is only trouble, not illness. I will tell you all about it directly. Only come inside, pray—you must be tired, and you are standing all the time."

There was a little fire burning in the studio, and they went there, Helwyse dropping into a chair, and waiting for the tidings he knew not how best to give. A minute passed thus, the curate in his intense pitifulness, seeking such words as

might soften his evil news, Helwyse watching him, lacking courage to interrogate, only with her eyes entreating him to speak.

“It is nothing that cannot be got over, and I feel sure you would wish me to come straight to you,” blundered Mr. Starffe. “I have been lying in wait for you these four days, only Mr. Bryan knows nothing about it. Please do not tell him. He has got into difficulties about money. You see, this has been such a hard year for him, what with the long illness in the house—”

The simple-hearted curate whilst pleading Bryan’s cause as if before his hard-hearted creditors, forgot the depth of Helwyse’s affection for her brother. Had Bryan committed a crime, that tender, all-forgiving incomparable sisterly love would have surely pardoned, or at least

found excuse. As it was, no sooner did Mr. Starffe mention his pecuniary difficulties than Helwyse began reproaching herself for not having loved him twice as much. Why! oh why, had she stayed away so long? Why had she not written oftener, thus encouraging him to tell her everything? Why had she ever allowed the world to come between them? During the last year, she had gone very little to Hornsey, partly because she was busier, and much more taken up by society, than formerly; partly, also because Emilia's vexatious fretfulness would often take the form of downright jealousy. Helwyse had felt many a time that her sister-in-law was comparing their positions with mingled envy and self-compassion. Whilst Emilia was occupied with housewifely, motherly, wifely, cares from morning to night, Helwyse was

leading a deliciously free, untroubled, varied life, painting pictures that brought her fame and fortune, visiting in rich country houses, travelling abroad, being made a heroine of everywhere. Thus, without her affection being lessened, Helwyse had gradually got into the habit of visiting Bryan and Emilia seldomer and seldomer, and he on his side paid still rarer visits to Kensington. Care-worn, irritated with himself and with all the world, Bryan made constant excuses for staying away. Thus it had come about that the brother and sister seemed drifting farther and farther from each other's sympathies, of late, and trouble had fallen on Bryan of which Helwyse knew nothing.

All these things passed across her mind like lightning now, and whilst Mr. Starffe was trying to bring forward the most convincing arguments on Bryan's

behalf, she was taking the blame of his misfortunes to herself. She might so easily have prevented them, she thought, had she only been less absorbed in that happier life from which he was shut out, had she only cared for his interests and loved him a little more! At that moment her heart was full of compassion for Emilia as well. If Bryan was in trouble, Emilia was in trouble also, and all she wanted to do was to go to them, help them, comfort them at once.

"Oh! poor Bryan," she cried, suddenly bursting into tears. "What can I do to help him?"

"Everything," said Mr. Starffe cheerfully. "It is merely a question of money, you know. He got into debt some time ago, and it is really not to be wondered at, seeing the high price of everything, and then the long spell of illness in the house

last spring, when you were away, and the debt instead of being paid got bigger and bigger, and now it is very large indeed, and——”

“He is not in prison!” Helwyse said, starting from her chair and taking hold of his arm with a look of mingled terror and supplication. “Oh, say he is not in prison!”

“No, indeed, it is not so bad as that. Take heart, dear Miss Helwyse,” answered the curate, ready to cry himself at the sight of her distress. “Now that you have come home and are ready to pay the money, all will be well. I would have done it with a heart and a half, but I am a poor man, and it is a large sum, as I say. It is two hundred and thirty-three pounds and odd shillings in all.”

“I have got the money,” Helwyse said, still crying. “Why did he not write to me? Why did no one write?”

"I would have written had I known your address, you may be sure, but Mr. Bryan only told me a few days ago, and you had already started on your homeward journey."

"Ah! I forgot. It is I who ought to have written. What must Bryan think of me?"

"But how could you tell what was happening at home? And there is yet time." Then, seeing that Helwyse had not quite realized the situation, he added—
"What has made Mr. Bryan so anxious is this—the people to whom he owes the money have got a bill of sale on his furniture, and unless the money is paid by eight o'clock to-night, they can take possession. That is why I was so anxious to see you back."

"Let us go at once," Helwyse said, feeling sick at heart, re-tying her bonnet-strings,

and taking up her cloak. “To Hornsey, I mean. Why do we stay a minute?”

“I think, after your journey, you should take a little refreshment. Take a crust of bread and a glass of wine,” said the curate, placing his hand on the bell.

“No, I will eat something with Bryan by-and-by. I would rather not wait, indeed.”

“But let us first think about the money. Here is the amount written down, and I fear it will be necessary to take the exact sum with us. I can supply fifty pounds in cash—that would reduce it to one hundred —”

“No, indeed, I have got the money, thank you,” Helwyse said, greatly touched. “If I had not, I would accept your offer gratefully. But I have enough and to spare in the bank, only all the banks are shut now. What shall we do?”

"A cheque would do, or a written order, if you do not keep a cheque-book. Let me fetch paper and pen and tell you how to word it."

But Helwyse produced a cheque-book from her desk, and, when Mr. Starffe had filled in the amount, with trembling fingers signed her name. Then the curate put it away safely in his pocket-book with as triumphant an air as if it were a parochial testimony to himself.

"How good of you!" he said. "This will put matters straight for the present, and there will be time enough for Mr. Bryan to settle his affairs after. But it will be a load off his mind to get out of the clutches of these people, and I am sure you give the money as willingly as if you were not growing richer and more famous every day."

He said this looking at her smilingly,

admiringly, encouragingly, but Helwyse answered in a tender, self-reproachful voice—

“ Is he not my brother ? ”

Little indeed was she thinking of fame or fortune just then. Her mind had suddenly filled to overflowing with recollected joys and sorrows of childhood, when, hand in hand, and cheek laid to cheek, she had rambled with Bryan in search of wild flowers and birds’-nests in their native village. Few and slight were the cares that brother and sister had shared in common then ; but if Bryan got scolded for tearing his clothes or marauding in the orchard, Helwyse was sure to console him with her share of cake ; and if Helwyse wept over a broken doll or a dead bird, it was Bryan who acted the consoler, Bryan who put up a swing for her in the barn, Bryan who took her on to the hills, and

ferried her across the pond in a tub, Bryan who performed a hundred exploits, at which she could only shudder admiringly. They had been together more than most brothers and sisters, had gone to the same village school, had loved the same sports ; and Helwyse, thinking of all these things on a sudden, wondered how they could have lived so far apart since. She thought with fondest looking back of those early days in her beloved Ireland, of the woods in spring-time, when the cuckoo sang unseen, yet close by, in the hedges, and the turf was carpeted with primroses and wood-anemones ; when about the meadows and along the river-side, the marsh-marigold had delighted their hearts with its flaming flower ; of delicious summer noons among the corn-fields, where, stretched beneath the shadow of the wheat-sheaves, they rested between the gold and the blue,

and dreamed of a future brighter than any fairy-tale. Oh ! exquisite days of spring-tide joys and dreams ! Oh, bright threshold of life we have crossed for ever ! The brother and sister may be severed by good or evil fortune, by faults and blemishes of character then unheard of, or by sorrow and shame and suffering unspeakable ; the world may harden as well as divide those whose earliest happiness was to be together—yet do we ever forget those far-off days, those cherished scenes, that ineffable, unsullied childish love ? Do we not all, at some time or other, turn to such memories wistfully, beseechingly, penitently, saying to ourselves that we are less changed than we seem ; and the very longing makes us better, brings us nearer to all that is lost, and intensifies a recollection of what was, sweeter than all we have gained since.

Helwyse could not be comforted just

then, in spite of all the curate might say ; and when they were fairly on their way to Hornsey, he saw that she was still crying under her veil.

“Indeed you have nothing to reproach yourself with ; and all will go well with Mr. Bryan now,” he said. “Pray do not distress yourself. I am sure you do not know how much it grieves me to see you in tears.”

That little speech had the desired effect. Helwyse, in order to please her kind friend, put on a cheerful countenance, and during the rest of the journey, she tried to talk to him about ordinary things, her journey, his parish work, and so on. Mr. Starffe, seeing her smile once more, grew almost gay in his turn. He found it delightful to be sitting by her side in the railway-carriage, to have her leaning on his arm when they alighted, and, but for Bryan’s

sake, could have wished the journey twenty times as long.

Poor Mr. Starffe ! When Helwyse thanked him for his kindly interest in Bryan's affairs and praised him for taking the initiative, his heart bounded. She was the only romance in his hard-working, pious, unpoetic life ; she was the only woman he had ever compared with the heroines of poetry and fiction, and sweeter, lovelier, to his thinking, than any of these. Very likely, some day or other, the good curate's affections would be stormed by the inevitable widow, but Helwyse Fleming would remain his ideal to the last. The very soberness of her bearing had charms for him ; some men found the young artist cold, others proud, not a few thought her too serious for her years, but in Mr. Starffe's eyes she was just perfection. To have

tried to improve her would be but gilding refined gold and painting the lily. He set her beside Angelica Kaufmann and Rosa Bonheur. Were she created a Baroness in her own rights by the Queen, or a Royal Academician by the Academy of Arts, were she decorated with the Cross of the Legion of Honour, he would have acknowledged her worthy of these things and more. His admiration went so far as to blind him to any imperfections in her work, any defect in her judgment. She was good and wise, gifted and beautiful, and he loved her, and not so desperately as to wish that they had never met. On the contrary, he felt happier for seeing her, no matter how wide the gulf between them. But to be for the nonce her confidential friend, her champion, her protector, delighted him beyond measure, and filled him with childishly proud and happy thoughts.

How readily she took his arm! How unhesitatingly she followed his advice! She even dried up her tears at his bidding!

When they reached the Crouch End Station, he saw that she was again greatly agitated. The near prospect of seeing Bryan unnerved her, and filled her with longing and apprehension. In a few minutes more her arms would be round him. She would pour into his ear all her love and penitence. Yet, she felt, might not something hinder the desired understanding at the last moment? How hard it would be to tell Bryan all that was in her heart, if the opportunity did not come now!

“Do not distress yourself, whatever you do, dear Miss Helwyse,” said the curate very kindly. “The meeting between your brother and yourself will be painful, of course, but how happy it will

make him to have you back again, and we will soon put his affairs straight, never fear that."

She looked at him gratefully, but said nothing, and as they walked along he could see that she was again in tears.

By the time they reached the garden-gate it had grown dark, and the well-known little house looked strangely dreary. No light was burning either above or below, no cheery flame issued from the parlour grate, no welcoming faces peered out. All was cold, dark, silent.

Mr. Starffe's gentle tap was answered by Patrick, who, not knowing where to look for his host, had naturally run home for a little while. The lad looked pale, dishevelled, frightened, and said, as he recognised the curate,

"The man is here, sir."

Then, catching sight of Helwyse, he

uttered a cry of joyful surprise, and would have precipitated himself into her arms, but, with a hasty kiss, she brushed past him thinking only of Bryan.

“The man is here, sir—from Mr. Sharp’s, I mean. He said you would expect him at this time, unless he heard something from you,” continued Patrick.

Mr. Starffe uttered a strong ejaculation of surprise and disgust—pardonable even in a clergyman under such circumstances—and hastened downstairs with the lad. The fact is, the curate, in his anxiety not to have recourse to Freedland till the last moment, had so far blundered as to cause that invasion on the part of the money-lender’s emissaries which Bryan and Emilia had dreaded so much. Mr. Starffe had either mistaken the hour or had hoped that they would give a little grace. Anyhow, as the money was not

forthcoming to the stroke of the clock at the time appointed, a messenger—in other words, a bailiff—had been dispatched, in Mr. Sharp's words, “just to see that all was right, and allow us to sleep quietly in our beds.”

Mr. Starffe, you may be sure, administered a clerical reproof as he paid the man and sent him about his business. Then, enjoining discretion on Patrick, and preaching him a little sermon on prudence in worldly affairs generally, he awaited the others in the parlour. He ought, perhaps, having fulfilled his errand, to have gone away, but such moderation was more than could be expected of human nature.

Helwyse, finding all dark and deserted below, had hastened upstairs. There was a tiny room on the first story, overlooking the garden appropriated to Bryan's use, and here she knew she should find

him. It had been made pretty and comfortable by Emilia in brighter days, with flowers in the window, bookshelves, a writing-table, a few prints on the walls, and gay chintz curtains ; but was somewhat neglected now. Still, Bryan loved it, and though he had shut himself up to indulge in moodiness rather than literary recreation of late, it was ever his favourite corner.

Helwyse opened the door very gently, and, in spite of the dusk, saw at once that he was there. The room possessed but one arm-chair by the window, in which he sat now, his head buried in his hands, his whole attitude betokening humiliation and despair. He did not look up when she turned the door-handle; and he made no answer when she said, in the tenderest tone, “ Bryan, dear, it is I—Helwyse.”

Even when she stood beside him, resting

both her hands on his shoulder, her sweet face bent down to his, he gave no sign of recognition and joy. Then Helwyse stooped down, and putting her arms round his neck, held him tight, laid her tear-wet cheek to his, kissed him, not once, but a hundred times. Using that childish language and those pet names only familiar to themselves, and now for the first time recalled since the careless years when they were girl and boy, and all in all to each other, she cried—

“Do not be troubled, Binny dear—every-thing is made right now. Why should you mind taking Hessie’s money? It is all yours, if you want it, you know. Hessie loves you better than anything else in the world.”

Brother and sister were once more folded in each other’s arms, as in the old days, and surely Emilia could not have grudged them this sweet and solemn re-

newal of old confidences. They wept together till their hearts grew light, then they talked long and earnestly of the past and the future—all that retrospection and looking forward of Bryan's life from which she had been hitherto shut out—and both felt that, whatever might happen, nothing should divide them again.

CHAPTER IV.

NURSE AND PATIENT.

"**H**AD we not better go to poor Emmie now?" asked Bryan, after a time; "perhaps no one has told her of your coming even." But Helwyse sent him downstairs to bid Mr. Starffe stay to supper, and went to her sister-in-law alone.

She found her in the nursery, stitching away at some juvenile garment as fast as her fingers could move. All the children were away except Norah, who was now sleeping as softly in her little bed as if nothing unusual had happened. Emilia could better bear her wretchedness whilst

employed, and throughout the day had busied herself by helping her youthful maid-of-all-work in a kind of general turn-out. “The children are away, so we may as well clean the house,” she said, in reality choosing such an occupation to keep away desperate thoughts. As soon as tea was over, which she had taken with Norah alone, Bryan not yet having come home, she had fled to the nursery, as a harbour of refuge. She knew that whilst undressing and putting little Norah to bed, no one would disturb her with evil news. The child’s innocent presence was a kind of palladium from trouble and turbulence, and though the little prayer was quickly said, and the little prattler quickly sound asleep, Emilia still stayed on, dreading to go downstairs. She did not hear Mr. Starffe’s gentle tap, nor the sound of his voice in the hall, but an unknown knock half an hour

before had filled her with apprehension, and none, she thought, were courageous enough to bring her the dreaded tidings. Neither she nor Bryan knew that Freeland's money was forthcoming if needed. Yes, they were ruined, disgraced for ever, and Bryan would never be able to hold up his head again!

Emilia thought, with some natural envy, of Helwyse's happier lot then. What did Helwyse know of these miserable cares, these grinding troubles, these harassing anxieties? She was entirely happy, Emilia thought, and perhaps just a trifle wrapped up in her own existence. Why had she not written? Why did she stay so long away? Who should be near them in their sorrow, if not Helwyse?

And whilst thinking such thoughts as these, accusing Helwyse, not of selfishness

or coldness, but only of a little carelessness, a little neglect, hardly to be wondered at, perhaps, who should open the door and walk in but Helwyse herself! Emilia did not need to ask the nature of her errand. She knew from that bright face that Helwyse had already lifted the heaviest burden from their shoulders. Putting down her work, and rising hastily to greet her welcome visitor, she said, in her brisk, unmoved, unsentimental manner,

“Oh! Helwyse, what a mercy you have come back! We have had nothing but trouble since you went away!”

“But I hope the worst is over now,” Helwyse answered, adding, “And you should have written, you know.”

“How could we write to you on such matters, when you were out on a holiday? Besides, you know what Bryan is. He

would rather starve than deprive you of anything. I am so pleased to see you, and I suppose you had Mr. Kingsbury's company all the time?" Then Emilia looked inquiringly into her sister-in-law's face, asking, as plainly as possible, if indeed what had been so long foretold had come to pass, and Helwyse was engaged to Kingsbury.

"I will tell you all about my journey at supper. It is quite ready—Mr. Starffe is there. Let us go downstairs at once," Helwyse answered cheerfully. Then, without a word more, the two descended to the parlour. Bryan put Helwyse by Mr. Starffe's side, and the meal passed off tolerably, though no one was wholly at ease except Patrick. Bryan, indeed, who had been worrying himself in secret for months past, was really ill, though he did

not know it, and whilst he ate and drank, and talked with unnatural animation, ought to have been under medical treatment in bed. Still he would not give way, and next morning went to the City, feeling that headache and depression were ridiculous now. He got through the day's routine somehow, and returned home earlier than usual, as he said, to have a long talk with Helwyse, but, in reality, because he was feeling too ill to stay.

The three sat up late over the fire that second night of Helwyse's return, and talked over family affairs in general, and the children's future in particular. Emilia shrank from no sacrifice, however bitter, now, and was ready to go into a tiny lodging with Bryan to-morrow. In fact, she made almost a parade of her resignation and renunciating spirit, although they had come a little late. They would

give up their house next term, would give up keeping a servant, would do anything to avoid difficulties and disgrace for the future. It would be two years, at least, before Patrick could shift for himself. Bridget could not, as yet, perhaps, be regarded as provided for, and Hilary was a delicate little fellow, requiring all kinds of indulgences. Thus Emilia's economies were needed as much as ever, and till the orphans were grown up, and in a fair way to earn their own living, Bryan and herself must think of them first, and their own little ones afterwards.

"It happens so sometimes," Emilia said, in a moralizing tone. "Helwyse was born to be fortunate, and you were not, Bryan, that is all. Why should you be a humble clerk all your days, and Helwyse get money and reputation?"

Bryan said nothing, for, put it in what

words he would, he felt that he could never make Emilia see things from his own point of view. He did not blame her, only himself, for all the trouble that had fallen upon them. He was more experienced in the ways of the world than she, he was the bread-winner, moreover, and the head of the house. It was his duty to insist upon that line of conduct he felt to be expedient, just, and honourable, his part to prevent, in some way or other, any deviation, no matter how slight, from the path of duty. He could not forget all this for a moment, and the thought that he alone was culpable, haunted him day and night. Bryan, in fact, was sickening of remorse, and after two or three days of wretched battling with the fever that was on him, finally succumbed, held fast in its clutches. The very morning on which Helwyse returned home,

and began unpacking her newly acquired Italian treasures, came a message from Emilia, saying that Bryan had been sent back from the City, very ill.

So Helwyse put away her work, and set off to Hornsey instead. It was an ordinary case of illness, brought on by mental distress, the doctor said, and with quiet and good nursing, he hoped brain-fever might be avoided. Little Norah was despatched to Camberwell, whither Kathleen and Margie had gone a few days back, Patrick continued to stay at the curate's, and Hilary was safe and well with Miss Wren. The house being thus quieted, Emilia and Helwyse devoted themselves entirely to their patient. Freeland, you may be sure, found time to go to Hornsey, and inquire after Bryan and Helwyse at the door, Mr. Starffe called every morning to see if he could be useful

in doing errands ; but otherwise, they saw no one.

When Mrs. Bray informed Helwyse's numerous visitors that she was nursing her brother through a serious illness, they left cards, and drove away. Helwyse, under the circumstances, was well pleased that they were less persevering than Freeland and the curate. She wanted to give her whole mind to Bryan and Bryan's affairs for the present, and when the following little notes arrived, put them aside without replying. The first, from Kingsbury, ran thus—

“ DEAR MISS FLEMING,

“ May I have a word from you to tell me when you will be back, and also to report on the progress of your invalid, and your own health. We are all quite unable to do without you here, which must plead excuse for troubling you with a let-

ter. Mrs. Cornwell suggested a round robin from all your friends, but that would not be fair, as we really do not know what urgent reasons you may still have for staying away. Pray relieve our suspense as soon as possible ! I trust—if you have had time to look at them—you are as much delighted with your recent acquisitions as I am. The bronzes are superb, and the Venetian glass quite fairy-like. All these trifles should go into our studios. Fortunately, we get tired of one thing just in time to remove it for another. Half your old favourites will, I suppose, like mine, have to be sacrificed for the new.

“ Yours very truly,

“ E. KINGSBURY.”

The second was from Papillon :—

“ MY DEAR FRIEND,

“ Bridget is charming. I am

enchanted to renew all the promises and proposals I made to you concerning her nearly two years and a half ago. When may I spend an hour with you to talk over my intentions concerning her? I have just heard from Mrs. Cornwell of your return:

“Your sincere friend,

“H. P.

“Bridget’s love, and will write to-morrow.”

Helwyse breathed a sigh of relief over the last note. Bridget, then, was in safe hands also, and for the present she need not trouble herself about any of the children. She was at liberty to give her whole mind to Bryan.

“Do go back to Kensington, Helwyse,” Bryan would say when he was quite himself, for the fits of delirium were slight

and unfrequent. “What a waste of time for you to be here, and just after six months’ holiday travel, too.”

“Nonsense,” was Helwyse’s invariable answer. “My work can wait, and when you are well again, you will not want me to nurse you, you know.”

“But your Academy picture, dear?”

“Oh! there is time enough. There is time enough for everything when you are quite well again.”

“I am much better. I think you might quite well go home in a day or two. It will be hard on you to lose time as well as money, through me, Helwyse.”

“Let us not worry, but talk of something pleasant,” Helwyse would say, and straightway begin to chat about unimportant matters of a cheerful nature. Bridget was well and happy, Ambrose had greatly improved in drawing, she should

go and see the little girls on such and such a day, and so on. She was more skilful, too, than Emmie, in warding off dangerous topics. Emilia, being still repentant and full of good resolutions for the future, strove to introduce a little wholesome moralizing upon every occasion. To her it seemed almost like a want of Christian charity to keep Bryan in ignorance of her numerous economies just then.

"I have found the nicest little cottage for us at twenty pounds a year," she said one day; "and a bit of garden at the back, and in such a cheap neighbourhood. Think of meat being only eightpence a pound!"

At which piece of information Bryan tried to smile, though rents and prices were the last things he wanted to hear of just then. Helwyse, meantime, during those long quiet hours, within Bryan's call, sometimes in his room, sometimes in the

little closet adjoining it, where she had found him in his grief, occupied herself chiefly with one thought and one question —how could she make his life wider, happier, more like her own in the future ?

Bryan shared many of her tastes. He loved literature passionately. He had written sketches and verses which showed considerable promise. He liked nothing so well as the near companionship of books. But his early marriage had cut him off from all these things, and the clerkship, which afforded a small but certain income, left little leisure for his favourite pursuits. It seemed hard, thought Helwyse, that the good things of life should be so unequally distributed between them, all the opportunities of culture, the friendship of highly-instructed men and women, the sympathy of congenial minds, leisure for travel and study, last but greatest, the joy

of recognition falling to her share; the treadmill of routine, the petty cares of a troubled domestic life, isolation from what he craved for, falling to his. She entirely believed that Bryan possessed the creative faculty as well as herself. He had left off not only writing, but even reading, poetry of late, and partly on account of his reticence, and partly because she saw so little chance of helping him, she had also left off asking about his compositions. He had no time to finish anything, no time to carry out his ideas, he had said, and so Bryan's poems had become things of the past. Thinking of all this, she was preparing the little room for Bryan's removal thither next day, when she came upon a small packet of manuscript stowed away beneath some books. The writing was Bryan's. As he always let her go to his papers, she sat down to

peruse the opening pages without hesitation. It was poetry, not prose, a series of half a dozen little stories of Irish country life, novelettes, love-stories, recollections of childhood, and as she read on eagerly, it was with the growing conviction that here at last Bryan had written something sure to find readers. These idyllic scenes, sketched with an unfaltering hand, these incidents of village life, abounding in fancy, tenderness, and pathos, with a sparkle of Irish wit here and there, appealed to all who love in literature what is fresh, and real, and joyous. There was little sadness in any ; it seemed as if the writer had wholly withdrawn himself from the cares and experiences of later existence, to live again, for the time, among the spring-tide gladness and pure, untarnished recollections of early youth. As Helwyse read, she saw again the familiar

landscapes loved so well, the winding river with its emerald banks, the golden valleys where purling streams flow, the wide-stretching pastures, the moss-carpeted woods, the lovely blue lakes with their fairy-like islets, above all, the violet hills.

And as she read on, she recognized many a friend of her youth, too, the village schoolmaster, the kindly pastor, the peasant folk, careless-hearted, passionate, so easily moved to smiles or tears, the old servants at well-remembered fair and wake, the schoolfellows so long lost sight of; all these were here, living, speaking, acting as in real life, only, perhaps, a touch more poetically.

Helwyse read on, weeping and smiling by turns, and when she came to the last page, put away the manuscript tenderly, intending to show it to Papillon. She

wondered to herself how it came about that Bryan's latest compositions—for the stories all bore recent dates—could be the gayest, but so it was. As not infrequently happens, Bryan had simply written out of a desperate craving for self-forgetfulness. During the last few troubled months of his existence, he had found his sole consolation in recalling impressions and experiences so vivid still, yet so remote! How often have the brightest poems been written under the dreariest circumstances, the gayest romances inspired by sorrow rather than joy! Were it not so, were the mind incapable of thus throwing off its burdens, the heart its desolations, life would cease to be supportable. As it is, what often appears like want of soul or of heart in times of trouble, is just our safety-valve and salvation. When the capacity of joy is lost,

then the human being is lost past recovery and resurrection. Had Bryan not fled to such pure fancies as a refuge, he would most likely have taken to drink or gambling. He found happiness in the possession of this creative faculty, and the bright things he created saved him. *

That very evening Helwyse despatched the little packet to Papillon, charging him to transmit it to a publisher. Whether they brought Bryan fame or fortune was another matter. What she wanted him to feel was that he had something new to live for, to hope for, and, above all, something to bring their two lives nearer together. Full of all kinds of hopes and dreams, on Bryan's behalf, she gave her full energies to the invalid.

Bryan being thus carefully nursed, and having an excellent constitution to begin with, soon mended. When he got strong

enough, Emilia was to take him to the sea for a little change, but that would not be for another week or two. Meantime, Helwyse felt that her place was by Bryan's side as long as he needed her, and so her Italian treasures still remained in their cases, her Academy picture was not yet begun, and all her artistic friends were tearing their hair and wringing their hands.

Now that Helwyse's brother was all but well again, why should Helwyse stay away?

She thought otherwise. Bryan needed her far more than in the first days of his illness.

"How pleasant it is to wake up and see you sitting by the window, Helwyse, dear," he would say again and again. "It is years and years since I have had you all to myself, you know."

Reading aloud, unless something of the lightest, most amusing kind, was out of the question, anything like serious talk also ; but there were a dozen ways in which Helwyse could amuse him whilst Emilia was busy in the house, or marketing in the Seven Sisters' Road. She made little sketches from the window, bringing in the noble crest of Highgate Hill and wide-stretching woods on either side, or she talked of her Italian travels, or she told amusing little anecdotes about Papillon and Mrs. Cornwell, busied all the time with needlework or embroidery. Helwyse did not possess the kind of fingers that can lie listlessly on the lap. She must do something to occupy them, were it hemming dusters, and she got through a good deal of work for Emilia whilst talking to Bryan.

“ I never realised, till I had this illness,” Bryan said one day, “ what an exquisite

thing is light. Even in my best nights, I have not slept long at a time, and I cannot tell you with what a throb of rapture I hailed the dawn. It comes gradually; first you can only just distinguish the shape of the furniture, and the pictures on the wall, and darker objects rising out of the background; then you see all these things clearly, and far away the light like a flame spreading over the housetops and the church spires, till the darkness has vanished utterly."

"Yes," answered Helwyse, "I am always thankful that I was born in the country, where people rise, as the saying is, with the lark. I feel compassionate towards those who have no taste for early rising. It is as bad as being colour-blind, or having no ear for music."

He smiled, and added—

"Dear, I do not want to talk of it

now, and perhaps, when I am strong and well, I never shall ; but I never realised, till I lay ill in bed, watching so eagerly for the light, how wrong I have been—I mean in not managing my affairs differently. I thought, too, that I might not get better—who can tell, in such cases, what may happen ?—and I wanted so much to put a thought I had into words. I could not, of course, do it then, but I have done it since. Will you write down what I dictate ?”

“ Had we not better wait a little—just a day or two ?”

“ No, no,” Bryan said. “ I must get it off my mind. I might forget it, and it will save me saying to you and poor Emmie what otherwise I could not say half so well. It will not take five minutes. Write away.”

So Helwyse brought out pencil and

paper, and turning her back to him, for there were tears in her eyes, wrote—

“THE PRAISE OF LIGHT.”

Who praiseth thee in fittest mood, O Light?

Perhaps 'tis he who, while the city sleeps,
Long time the sick man's dreary vigil keeps,
And wistful counts the signs of waning night.
The dying sounds of wheels, the midnight hush,

The according bells of congregated towns,
That slowly tell the round of passing hours,
Till daylight dawns at last; then with a rush
Of glad expectancies, he weeps and prays,
And half he prays to light, and half to God.

“If now indeed I tread the upward road
That leads from death to life's familiar ways,
Oh, lovely Light, let me no longer shame,
By life unclean or crooked, thy sweet name!”

“That is all,” Bryan said. “Don't make any criticisms, my dear; and now I think I can go to sleep.”

Helwyse read and re-read the little poem with a full heart, you may be sure, but never, from that day to this, did Bryan mention its origin, or speak of it even to her.

CHAPTER V.

BRIDGET A DÉBUTANTE.

WHEN Bridget made her *début* before Papillon, it was in the fullest conviction that he would be brought back to his old opinion, and that he would at once further her wishes to the utmost. She did not know what acting was, how should she, seeing that all her experience of it consisted in a few representations of a second-rate provincial theatre? Still less did she know what was passing in Papillon's mind whilst he gravely acted the part of audience. When, therefore, she stood before him in a theatrical attitude, and recited, with unfaltering memory and considerable

power, those long speeches from *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Hamlet*, etc., which had made the children shudder, she naturally hoped to produce effect. Had Papillon encouraged her, she would doubtless have gone on declaiming till midnight, in her intense desire to impress him. As it was, when she had delivered her longest and most exciting monologue, without receiving a word of praise, she naturally felt a little disappointed. The fact is, Papillon, who knew all these things by heart, felt somewhat overwhelmed by Bridget's redundancy. He loved the sound of that sweet young voice well enough, but he preferred it in conversation, and though he admitted that her performance displayed ability, could have wished her subjects less hackneyed.

“Tell me what you would have. Find fault, only say something,” she said at last,

impatiently “How can I tell, whilst you sit by looking like a statue, that you do not think me a goose for my pains?”

“I assure you I am thinking no such thing. You have a remarkably good memory, and considerable dramatic power. But——”

“Why must there be any buts? I must try—I must succeed. Let me give you Portia’s speech at the trial scene,

‘The quality of mercy is not strained—’”

“To-morrow night, then. You will tire yourself,” said Papillon, entreatingly.

“No; now that I have begun I would rather go on. I want you to be able to judge for yourself. But if you don’t like Portia’s speech, then let it be Constance’s,

‘Grief takes the semblance of my absent child—’”

“Suppose we leave off for the present,” Papillon urged coaxingly. “If you exhaust your stock to-night, you will have nothing left for to-morrow, you know.”

“Oh !” Bridget broke out, laughing a little maliciously, “when I have done with the plays, there are my readings from the poets, you know. There is the *May Queen* now. The boys say it is one of my best pieces. I will give you that.”

And straightway she began—

“If you’re waking, call me early, call me early, mother dear,

To-morrow is the happiest day of all the glad new year—”

“Try something else, my dear child, something I have not heard before,” Papillon asked, growing desperate.

“Well, I will give you *The Song of the Shirt*. You do not know that, I daresay ?”

And before Papillon could remonstrate, she was fairly launched, Papillon pulling her up at the line—

“A woman sat in unwomanly rags, singing the song of the shirt—”

“It happens that I have heard *The*

Song of the Shirt before," he said. "What else can you remember?"

"Dozens of things," poor Bridget answered, triumphantly. "*The Charge of the Light Brigade*, for instance."

"Heaven forbid!" interrupted Papillon.

"*The Ride from Aix to Ghent—John Gilpin*," here she paused, and seeing that Papillon did not look enthusiastic, said, "Ah! I know what is sure to please you. It is very long; but, of course, I have only learnt the best parts."

And forthwith, to his crowning dismay, she began the *Ancient Mariner*, and got as far as—"Brown as the ribbed sea sand."

"I am sorry to say the *Ancient Mariner* is no favourite of mine," he said, making a desperate plunge into her third verse. "No, Bridget, let us have no more recitations to-night; but a little quiet talk instead. Sit down opposite to me."

She obeyed, looking considerably crest-fallen, and inclined to be rebellious.

"I must tell you that I am greatly pleased with your achievements. I had no idea that your memory was so good, or that you possessed such marked dramatic power."

"Then I may study for the stage? I shall be an actress, and able to help my poor boys?" cried the enraptured Bridget.
"Oh! let me begin at once."

"Well, no; why not work hard at your music and sums, say till Christmas? You will have enough to do, I am sure."

"I cannot wait at all. You do not know how impatient I am to begin, or how much I have thought about it. If I have the making of an actress in me, there is no time to lose—so you said at Beechholme Park," she said.

"Then you have quite made up your mind on the subject?"

"Quite. If I could earn as much money any other way, and you preferred it, I would give up the idea. But why should I give it up? How else can I make a home for my poor darlings?" and saying this she looked so ready to cry that Papillon hastened to say something consolatory.

"I will take you with me to call on that lady to-morrow morning, then, and we will see what can be done." Whereupon Bridget, feeling that she had been, perhaps, a little wilful, bade him good night, with a childishly penitent look, and a promise to obey his wishes in everything. Of course Papillon said she should do exactly as she liked.

Next morning he found, to his secret satisfaction, that the dramatic friend mentioned to Bridget was abroad, and not likely to return for three or four weeks.

There was nothing to do, therefore, but wait, and meantime, as he said, there were her music lessons and sums to occupy her time. Poor Bridget, quite determined that at the end of three or four weeks she should have little leisure for these things, worked away desperately. She hammered at her scales and exercises whenever Papillon was out of the house, and would on no account let him go off to his club before he had given her a lesson in arithmetic. The first week of her new life passed quickly, notwithstanding the home-sickness she tried hard to conceal. It seemed to her a year since she had left Hilary, she could hardly trust herself to think of him, so intense was her craving to see him again; and she would not for worlds have let Papillon know that she generally cried herself to sleep every night.

Hilary was at the sea now with Miss

Wren, so that he was farther out of reach than ever. "Do not fret, my dear," wrote her kind old friend. "Hilary is as happy as possible digging on these beautiful sands, and whenever he begins to fret for you, I have only to say—What would Bridget think?—and he stops at once. He is getting quite fresh-looking, and weighs already a pound and three-quarters more, for I always have children weighed, before and after, taking them to the sea. If they don't gain flesh they might as well be at home, and the money saved for another time, you know."

Those Bournemouth letters came when Bridget and Papillon would be sitting at breakfast, and it was some time before he could make out why she never opened them in his company. They were always looked at hungrily, lovingly, then

put aside to be read at leisure and alone. One day he opened the dining-room door when she fancied him safe in his study for the next hour or two, and thus found out how she read her letters. She was kneeling before the fire with the precious missive in one hand, the other keeping back the close black curls from her face, and tears, he knew not whether of joy or grief, were running down her cheeks.

He had entered the room softly, and as softly went away, that Bridget remained utterly unconscious of the interruption. But the next morning, when he came down to breakfast somewhat earlier than usual, he said to her carelessly, very much as if the thought had just entered his mind,

“I have a little pleasure in store for you, Bridget. What do you say to taking the mid-day train to Bournemouth?”

She stood crimson, trembling, speechless with joy.

"Make a good breakfast," he said. "Pack your carpet bag, and be ready to leave the house exactly at twenty-five minutes before twelve."

"Oh!" she answered, "ought I to let you take me? It will cost a good deal of money——"

"Nonsense. That is my affair. Pour out the tea at once, my dear, for I have a score of letters to write before starting."

Brigid was much too overjoyed to eat, and but for a severe scolding would not have so much as swallowed a cup of tea and bit of toast. Her radiant face did Papillon good to behold. What an easily-purchased pleasure for himself was the pleasure he was thus procuring her!

Long before the time appointed, every-

thing was as ready as could possibly be ; Bridget begged Desiré a dozen times not to be late with the cab, and no seven-year-old boy going home from school ever looked at the clock so eagerly, wishing the hands to move. Papillon, who was irritatingly fond of reaching a station just two minutes before the train started, could not be made to start till exactly twenty-five minutes before twelve. "I promise you not to miss the train," he said, "but the time most people wait at railway stations is simply deplorable." So he coolly wrote his eleventh letter when the cab was waiting at the door, teased Bridget for her impatience, and having tucked her in as if she were to pass a year of her life on the way, took his seat by her side, and arrived just in time to take tickets.

When fairly in the railway carriage, poor Bridget began to breathe freely.

"I was never so happy in all my life," she said, as they were rapidly whirled by express train towards Bournemouth. "I did not think it possible to be so happy. You see," she added, very confidentially, "I love Hilary better than anything else in the world. I never for a moment can get him out of my mind, never!"

"Well, I hope you will enjoy yourself very much. I shall leave you at the lodging, and go to the hotel, so that you will have Hilary all to yourself."

"How kind of you!" she cried, more in rapture than ever. "You are always thinking of something kind."

"I will not as much as once come near the house," Papillon went on, greatly amused.

"Oh! thank you. I shall be glad to have no interruptions. It is so long since Hilary and I were together!"

“Ah!” Papillon said, reproachfully, and affecting a hurt tone, “then you are very miserable with me, Bridget? If so, you must not stay.”

“You know that I am not miserable. If Hilary lived in the same street, I should be as happy as possible, I think. Only, of course, he cannot, and so we must both be a little miserable now and then.”

“But suppose that Hilary never felt it at all—children do very easily forget things, you know—could you not make up your mind to be happy away from him, then?”

“Never, never, never,” Bridget answered, almost fiercely.

Papillon laughed an approving little laugh.

“You are a good girl, and I promise you Hilary shall come to see you wherever you are,” he said.

Then they talked no more till they reached their destination. Once, on the way to Hilary's lodgings, Bridget could hardly contain herself for joy. The little pony-carriage went quickly, but, in her impatience, she felt as if she could have performed the journey quicker on foot. When the house was at last reached—a tiny cottage with a bit of flower garden, looking on to the sea in front, and pinewoods at the back—in Papillon's eyes a gimcrack of a place in a dull situation, in Bridget's, a Paradise, if ever there was one, so overjoyed was she that she said good-bye to her companion without even looking at him. Then she ran up the garden path, forgetful of everything but Hilary.

He was playing on the sands, the landlady said, and Bridget's quick eye soon discerned the pair—the diminutive form of Miss Wren, seated on a bench, and Hilary,

digging with his spade, close by. It was a bright, mild day, when all the invalids and all the children were sunning themselves by the sea, and Punch and Judy, fire-eaters, and other caterers to the public enjoyment seemed to spring up as naturally as mushrooms after rain.

Bridget ran down the steps leading to the beach, crying joyfully, at the top of her voice, "Hilary ! Hilary !" But the little fellow was too intent on his digging, and too unprepared for such a surprise, at first to take any heed. When she was quite close, the sound of her voice made him start and look up. For a moment he stood incredulous, then, dropping his spade, he sprang forward with an ecstatic cry.

"Oh ! Bridget, how did you come here ? That very moment I was thinking of you, and I said, 'Would not Bridget be pleased to see my sand fortress ?' Oh !

Bridget, Bridget, I must jump for joy."

And straightway, after having kissed her twenty times, he performed a series of gymnastics expressive of his intense delight, Miss Wren trotting up to the pair in the midst.

"Oh! my dear, what a pleasant surprise! And is not Hilary looking well? We have both such appetites, and I always say, it's as near like heaven as anything we can think of, to sit here reading novels, something thrilling, you know, and the sea so blue, and a German band playing on one side and Christy Minstrels on the other, and shrimps for tea when we go indoors."

Then Miss Wren went indoors to look after the tea, and Bridget and Hilary stole along the sands hand in hand. He had a hundred questions to ask, she a hundred things to tell. In all the kingdom

were not two happier hearts than theirs.

"I have been such a good boy, Bridget," Hilary said; "but"—here he pressed her hand to his cheek, and looked up into her face with a deprecating smile—"I couldn't help thinking about you, you know. I did shed five tears once—"

"What a goose you were to count them!" Bridget said. "And what on earth had you to cry about?"

"On Sundays I have something to cry about. As if I could bear to learn my Scripture history from other people, Bridget! Don't you remember what nice Sunday afternoons we used to have all by ourselves when Kathie and Margie and Norah were at their Bible-class, Patrick out for a walk, and Uncle Bryan and Aunt Emmie asleep in their arm-chairs? The Sunday after you went away I had no one to sit with me at

all, and I went up to our room, and looked out of the window, and knew I should not see you walking up the street if I looked ever so long. That is when I shed five tears, Bridget, dear."

"But you need never be alone," Bridget answered, cheerfully. "You could go to the Bible-class, if you like; or if you were quite quiet, you could read your Sunday books in the parlour."

Hilary shook his head.

"No, Bridget, none of your Bible-classes for me. You began to teach me my Sunday subjects, and you must leave off. When we all live together in our little house, we shall have time for everything."

They had so much to talk over, and Hilary had so many things to show her, that they walked on without thinking of the distance, not returning till Miss Wren had tormented herself with all kinds

of chimerical apprehensions. But they had neither tumbled over a cliff nor fallen into the sea. Hilary had not broken his nose, nor Bridget her ankle; so, after administering the mildest little scolding in the world, Miss Wren sat down to make the tea.

What a happy trio they made, and how Bridget enlivened the others with her merry talk! Hilary listened to her account of Papillon's house much as if she were describing a magician's palace, and certainly regarded him as quite the nicest person out of a fairy-tale.

How delightful to Bridget to have Hilary saying his little prayers at her knees once more, to tuck him into bed, and give the last fond kiss—to feel that her darling went to sleep that night as happy as any human being could be—then next morning to wake up and find that curly head on the

pillow beside her own, those loving little arms thrown round her neck, to hear the confidences accorded so readily. It seemed too good to be true.

"Well, my dears," said Miss Wren, as the two came down to breakfast with arms entwined. "I have got such news for you! Mr. Papillon is going back to London alone by the nine o'clock train, and you are to stay with us, Bridget, till he comes to fetch you. The message has just come."

Hilary clapped his hands for joy, and Bridget's face beamed, to cloud the moment after. Had she vexed her kind friend, that he was going away without saying good-bye? It was very thoughtful of him to leave her behind. She only wished that he had come instead of sending a message.

When breakfast was over she put on her hat and cloak, and without saying a word to anyone, set off towards the station as

fast as her legs could carry her. Miss Wren and Hilary were busy bargaining for fish at the back door, and her errand would only occupy half an hour. So she took up a central position outside the station, waiting for Papillon.

Of course he drove up at the last moment, not in the least expecting to see Bridget, who made a dash at him as he alighted.

"Take your ticket," she said, in her prim, motherly manner, and possessing herself of his bag, "and when you are in the carriage I can talk to you for half a minute."

There was no time to lose, so he obeyed, then walked leisurely towards the first compartment, Bridget hastening in advance with the bag.

"So you are pleased to stay, but did not like me to go off without bidding you

good-bye," he said, gratified at her zeal.

"No, I was quite vexed," she said. "I only wanted to have Hilary all to myself, just at first, of course."

"Well, shall I run down next Saturday to stay till Monday, still leaving you here?" Seeing the look of doubt that arose in her face, he added, "You must make up for lost time on your return, and nothing can be done about the acting till Mrs. Bramstone is home again."

"Oh! do leave me and come. I shall be at the station to meet you—to meet every train," was all Bridget had time to say. Kissing her hand to him then, she waited till he was out of sight, and ran home with a bright face.

Papillon, well pleased to see her so happy, found Bryanstone Square rather a dull place alone. For the last fortnight she had occupied his thoughts pleasantly

or embarrassingly at all hours of the day, When he went out, if only for an hour. she would accompany him to the door to say good-bye ; when he returned, she would run to open it, knowing the sound of his knock. Those merry breakfasts and dinners made meal-times, by comparison, dreary indeed. There was no one now to play with him, quarrel with him, to scold or be scolded ; and it was a kind of compensating pleasure even to see her little belongings here and there, her work-box in one place, her writing-case in another, her school-books on a little book-shelf he had made over to her use, her music lying on the piano. She would soon be back again, and that sweet, unworldly, joyous presence fill the house like sunshine. Yet, when he repeated to himself this consolatory sentence—she would soon be back again—he could but pause and hesitate.

Bridget was no longer a child. In a few weeks' time she would be eighteen. Notwithstanding her ingenuousness and childishness, she could not be treated as a little girl any more. Was it wise, was it kind, was it generous of him to place her in a false position? Supposing the plan of training her for the stage were carried out, all difficulties would at once be overcome. She must necessarily be placed under the roof of another person, and his influence over her would be greatly lessened.

But Papillon did not in the least want Bridget to become an actress now. He admitted her talent, her chances of success, her many personal advantages ; he hardly doubted in her powers, yet he regretted nothing so much as those unfortunate ambitions he had put into her mind two years and a half ago. He only wanted Bridget to grow into a beautiful, gifted, and capti-

vating woman. Why could she not make up her mind to accept an ordinary lot—namely, love, marriage, and domestic happiness? Were not these better than any amount of brilliant successes, feverish triumphs, flatteries, and lip-homage? What did she know of the world and its pitfalls? How could she measure the relative worth of the two prospects before her, on the one hand obscurity and peace, on the other, conspicuousness and contest? No, Bridget was too good for the world and for the stage. He would do all that in him lay to keep her for himself, or, as he put it in other words, to make her happy after his own way, which was without any doubt the best.

CHAPTER VI.

“ FLEETING IT GOLDENLY.”

TRUE to his word, Papillon appeared at Bournemouth the following Saturday, Bridget awaiting him on the platform. He took no carriage this time, preferring the walk with her instead, and certainly had no cause to complain of her welcome. She had been to the station to meet the first train, she said, though how foolish it was of her to suppose he would get up at seven o'clock in the morning! Hilary was on the sands with Miss Wren, so they could have a long talk about everything. And a very long talk they had indeed.

Papillon could not understand how it

was that they should find so much to say to each other, without ever touching on the hackneyed subjects of fairly intelligent conversation. The fact was that there was no kind of artificial barrier between them. They talked of themselves and each other just as openly as boy and girl on their way to school. It never occurred to Bridget to conceal her thoughts from so kind a friend and patient a listener, nor could Papillon bring himself to address her as he would have done an ordinary young lady. Her very divergence from the accepted type of a drawing-room beauty constituted her principal charm in his eyes.

What proper-minded Belgravian damsel, for instance, would not only meet him at the station, but propose a long *tête-à-tête* walk afterwards? He was more than double her years, it was true, but far from treating him with the uncoveted deference

due to such superiority, she behaved just as frankly and friendlily as if he were exactly her own age, and certainly, in so far as experiences of the world went, much the younger of the two. They were the best possible friends, and he would not on any account have seen her begin to blush, stammer, and simper, like other maidens in the presence of an admirer. That candid, joyous, uncompromising downrightness, so new to a man of the world, who had never lived in close intimacy with a young girl before, was delicious, captivating. There was a breadth and originality, moreover, about her equally novel. It never occurred to her to wonder, before speaking on the impulse of the moment, whether he would approve or not. She trusted him entirely, whilst on his part he felt constrained to manifest

equal straightforwardness. He dared not flatter Bridget. He felt bound to address her always on the highest grounds, and appeal to her noblest sentiments. He found himself constantly obliged to exercise self-control about presents. Papillon was one of the careless people, who are perpetually giving. The popularity thereby attained is pleasant, but cheaply purchased by a rich man, and, in Bridget's case, he had discovered long ago that it was not to be purchased at all. He was burning with impatience to give her such things as most women love—a gold watch to hang at her girdle, a pearl necklace, a velvet gown. On the subject of gifts she was perverse, as well as proud, and had declared from the beginning that if he bought her new dresses and trinkets she should not wear them.

“ You gave me leave to spend my allowance on Hilary,” she said ; “ and there is

nothing more to say on the matter. Besides, I have told you a dozen times I should hate myself in fine clothes. . I like to see them on other people—Mrs. Cornwell, for instance ; but how ridiculous I should look got up in the same way—my hair done by a hairdresser, carrying a train like a peacock's tail, and flowers and ornaments enough on my hat to fill a shop window. No, I like to wear a gown in which I can run about and do my sums."

Papillon found her much more tractable where her "sums" were concerned, and as he prevailed upon her to stay at Bournemouth a little longer, a piano was hired, a music-master found, and the enthusiastic Bridget practised away at her scales and exercises half the day.

The piano was one of Papillon's happy thoughts, and as she seemed uneasy at the less ornamental part of her education

standing still, he engaged a schoolmaster to come every evening for the purpose of teaching her arithmetic and geography. Thus, she was not only content, but delighted, to stay on till Mrs. Bramstone's return, all the more so as Uncle Bryan's illness made it desirable to have Hilary away.

Papillon was certainly a little Jesuitical in all this. He did not in the least want Mrs. Bramstone to come back. He only wanted Bridget to be contented and occupied, whilst he made plans for her future. To take her back to his house in London was rather difficult. She was—whether fortunately or unfortunately for himself, he hardly decided—too old to be treated as an adopted child, or a child at all. It was sweet and engrossing to have the charge of this bright young life, but a considerable perplexity as well, at least for the time.

When Bridget should be a year or two older, things would be very different, but, meantime, how could he do what was best for her and for himself? He could not bear the thought of losing Bridget now.

In answer to his second note, Helwyse had written hurriedly from Hornsey—

“ DEAR FRIEND,

“ We are in great trouble here, in consequence of my brother’s dangerous illness, and other matters. Thank you from my heart for your kind care of Bridget, and thoughtfulness concerning Hilary. They are much better at Bournemouth than in London just now. Yours gratefully,

“ H. F.”

As far as Bridget’s family was concerned, he felt that lie need fear no interference. Bridget was made over to his charge, and he was thankful as a poor man suddenly

come into a fortune. This was but one of a dozen attempts to poetise his life, and it had succeeded so far. He had complained of existence being dull of late years, the pleasures of society had wearied him, even his numerous intellectual amusements and activities had seemed uninteresting now and then, simply because he was alone. A man must be worldly, egoistic, or misanthropic, indeed, not to feel this want when he has entered on the period of middle-age; and Papillon was only just a little worldly, was only beginning to be egoistic, and not in the least misanthropic as yet.

So he allowed all kinds of hopes and fancies to hover about his mind, and, for the present, chiefly occupied himself with making Bridget's life as bright as possible. He hired a pony for her, bought hat and

habit, and insisted on teaching her to ride.

"Of what use can riding ever be to me?" asked the practical-minded Bridget, who thought the project delightful, only one involving unnecessary expense. The frugal, indeed necessitous experiences of her childhood were ever fresh in her recollection, and the luxuries she was now enjoying were contrasted with those early days, when she had wanted everything but bread!

"Of what use? To give me pleasure. I hate riding alone, and I shall get apoplectic if I leave it off."

"Did the doctors say so?" asked Bridget, opening her large eyes.

"Well, I have not yet consulted a doctor, but the thing speaks for itself. How stout I am growing! I must at once take steps to reduce myself."

Hilary, who happened to be present, and

who was shrewder than Bridget in many things, hereupon burst out laughing, and said,

“Oh ! Mr. Papillon, you are almost as thin as I am. You are taking Bridget in.”

“How can either of you tell what my sufferings are from dyspepsia ? Well, if Bridget won’t ride with me, I will go back to London and ask some one else.”

Of course Bridget consented, and to the infinite delight and pride of Miss Wren and Hilary, the two mounted next day. Bridget could ride without teaching—was there ever an Irish girl who could not ? They went from small things to great, till soon they would ride twenty miles across country. Papillon found this exercise and companionship delightful, and instead of running down, as he called it, from Saturday till Monday, ran down now from Monday till Saturday. The riding gave Bridget

a wholly new enjoyment of life. She had never before known what it was to experience the refreshment and exultation induced by rapid movement out of doors, and she beautified and brightened so rapidly, that Papillon fancied he saw improvement every day.

Her fresh, unrestrained gaiety was gradually rejuvenating him. It was a novel sensation to find these winter days so much too short, these rides through the pine-woods and on the windy brown hills, so eagerly looked for, so delightful in the reality! There was always some unexpected pleasure in store for him. Either Bridget's character showed in a new light, or he was able to interest and excite her in some quite undreamed-of field of thought or imagination. How much he knew that he could impart to

her ! How eagerly she looked to him for enlightenment and information ! Sometimes the sweet flattery of her inexperience made him feel himself wise by comparison ; whilst, on the other hand, she had her own opinions on everything, and not infrequently took him to task for what she held to be worldliness and frivolity.

By the sea, 'amid the pine-woods, or over the wind-swept downs, so long as the rain held off and the sun gleamed out now and then, they were hardly reminded of winter. When Bridget was not riding with Papillon, she was playing on the sands with Hilary, both as happy as two mortals could be. Separation might be before them, cares behind, but the moment was theirs, and they enjoyed it to the utmost.

“ Oh ! my darling, how strong and well

and contented he is!" thought Bridget, as she watched Hilary flying his kite one day. "What do we not both owe to Mr. Papillon? How can I ever thank him for all that he has done? How can I ever repay him?"

She put these thoughts into words one day, whereupon Papillon said, half in jest, half in earnest,

"I will tell you, Bridget. Banish that thought of going on to the stage, and stay with me instead."

"In idleness! Away from my poor boys! Never, never," she cried, and both found a refuge from uneasy thoughts in treating the conversation as a joke. This blissful time at Bournemouth was merely a holiday, an interlude, a reverie; the work-a-day world, the scene of conflict, the reality lay beyond. Bridget was constantly schooling herself into this

thought now. She had begun to fancy of late that to stay with Papillon and live idly always might be the pleasanter and easier life. She was at times almost angry with herself for feeling Papillon's suggestions, however playfully made, to be temptations. What right had she to be tempted? The path of duty lay clearly before her, and she could never be separated from Hilary, unless duty itself separated them.

So the invariable question with which she greeted Papillon at the railway-station was this—

“Has Mrs. Bramstone returned yet?”

For weeks the cheerful answer had been in the negative; but when at last Papillon was obliged to say yes, which he did almost morosely, Bridget thought, she at once said,

“Then will you take me back with

you to London on Saturday, please?"

And, of course, Papillon felt obliged to consent. He had come determined to speak to Bridget, to make, for once and for all, an attempt to dissuade her from her purpose; but he did not feel very sure of success. On the Monday he said—I will tell her to-morrow; when the morrow came, the conversation was put off till the next day, and so on from day to day, till the last moment.

But the time had come when he must speak or not at all. Bridget had packed her trunk, and was devising all kinds of little projects to divert Hilary's mind for the next day or two. Papillon could see how much the coming separation cost her, how much sorrow was mixed with the satisfaction she felt at the idea of going away. It was the old struggle over again. But it must be battled with and overcome.

"What train do we take to-morrow?" she said to Papillon on Friday evening. Hilary was in bed, Miss Wren had also retired. The two were sitting down to supper alone.

Here, then, was just the opportunity that he wanted. But how to begin!

CHAPTER VII.

PAPILLON UNVEILS HIS PROJECTS.

“ **W**HAT train do we take to-morrow?”
repeated Bridget, when she had finished her carving.

“ When we have finished supper, I will consult the railway-guide, my dear,” Papillon answered, looking so ill at ease, and so out of spirits, that she added, watching him anxiously,

“ Oh, Mr. Papillon, would you like my scent-bottle? I am sure your head is aching dreadfully! Or a little lavender-water sprinkled on your forehead? It always does Hilary good.”

"No, indeed. Don't pay any attention to me, if you please."

Bridget, seeing her companion in so uncongenial a frame of mind, chatted on, anxious to amuse him without any apparent effort. She could see that he was little inclined to eat or drink, but, taking no notice, she finished her own supper. Then—for Papillon was extremely sensitive on the subject of noise, especially that clatter of plates and dishes of which only maids-of-all-work are capable—she very quietly carried the supper-tray into the kitchen, and, bringing out her work, stitched away in silence.

"Come, Bridget," he said, impatiently, "can you not put aside your needle for five minutes? I want to talk to you."

Was there no pleasing him to-night? He had just before seemed to weary of her

light-hearted talk, and to lapse into silence, as if it were the only thing he cared about. Now, because she was quietly occupying herself, he appeared the very reverse of contented. With a little sigh of resignation, she folded Hilary's handkerchief and took off her thimble. Then she looked at him expectantly.

She was sitting by the table, and Papillon in an arm-chair by the fire, with a considerable space between them. We cannot talk confidences across a dinner table, and Papillon, without speaking, waited a moment suggestively, thinking she would be sure to know what he wanted, and take a chair a little nearer to his own. But Bridget sat still, her face wearing the same half serious, half playful look of expectancy.

He rose then, and placed a chair by her

side, having his back to the lamp and his face to the fire, Bridget all the time keeping her old attitude, so that the two talked to each other sideways.

“I want to say something to you about Mrs. Bramstone,” he began, with a hesitation she could not fail to see. “Provided this lady is willing to take you as a pupil, and thinks you have talent, are you quite decided to go on the stage.”

“Oh ! why do we talk of it any more ? You know it is the one thing I care most about. I used to think of nothing else till I came to Bournemouth.”

“And why have you thought less about it since coming here ?”

“You must know. Because I have been too happy, and that is your fault,” she added, turning towards him with a look of mixed gratitude and reproach. “You

have made me love being idle. If I had no one but myself to think about, I should desire nothing better than to spend all my days here riding about with you."

"I am sure I should like nothing better, either," Papillon answered, smiling.

"Oh! Mr. Papillon, how can you talk in that way?" Bridget cried, indignantly. "But you will never persuade me to give up my project. If you say to me—Bridget, you must not go on the stage—of course I should be obliged to submit; but there is nothing else I should like to do half so well. And then, by-and-by, how delightful to make a little home for the poor boys! We have all made up our minds where it is to be, and Ambrose, of course, will be there, too. We should live as happy as people in story-books."

"And you would forsake me, then?"

"How absurd to talk of forsaking you!" Bridget said, comfortably. "You could often come to see us, of course, and we could ride out together sometimes, and I might go to Bryanstone Square for a little stay when I was not too busy."

"Then you would always care for your old friend, Papillon," he asked, in a decidedly sentimental tone.

"As if I should not care! But I must think of the boys first, you know. That is only natural."

"Are you quite sure that the boys want you as much as I do, Bridget? They are growing up, they will go into the world, they will make their own way, you know. Stay with me, my dear——"

"In idleness; never," Bridget answered, shaking her head, demurely.

"You do not quite understand my mean-

ing," he went on, moving his chair a little nearer to the table. She also turned towards him, so that they were now sitting face to face. "When I ask you to give up your idea of becoming an actress, and to stay with me always, I mean as my wife. Will you marry me, Bridget?"

Bridget's first impression was that he was joking. But his eager look, the tone of his voice as he repeated the words, the unfamiliar shyness that had stolen over him, convinced her that he was but too much in earnest.

"How can I marry you?" she asked, on the point of crying with dismay, and, it must be added, disappointment. "What would become of my poor boys? They all want me more than ever, and it is for their sakes I wish to be an actress. It—is—very—unkind—of—you—to—ask—me—to marry—you," she sobbed out at last.

"Nay, I mean it at least in no unkindness," Papillon said, encouragingly. "I ask it because I love you, that is all."

"And I am sure I love you dearly," Bridget said, still sobbing, "after the boys, better than anyone—except Uncle Bryan and Aunt Helwyse. But I ought to think of the children first. Who will make a home for them, if it is not I? Who will keep them from mischief and bad habits if they are left to themselves? Patrick might take to drinking like poor papa——"

"But you could still help them and look after their welfare. You could have Hilary with you very often, and they all have a home with your aunt and uncle at Hornsey——"

"Aunt Emmie does not love them as I do. They do not listen to her as they do to me, and they would much rather live with me than anyone. What am I to do?"

asked poor Bridget, wiping her eyes and leaning her head on her hands in a deplorably bewildered attitude. “If you ask me to marry you, I must say yes, of course, to oblige you. If you asked me to jump into the sea, it would be the same.”

“And I fear you would as soon jump into the sea, my poor Bridget,” Papillon said very tenderly, lifting, as he spoke, her heavy curls from her tear-wet cheek.

“I cannot think of myself at all. You seem to forget that,” she said energetically, “I must put what is best for Hilary and the others before everything. Now, if I had you to take care of——”

“I think that is not quite how you should put it,” Papillon answered, in an aggrieved tone. “Would it not rather be my privilege to take care of you?”

“What does it matter how we put it? I am only thinking of what would really

happen. If I marry you, I could not make a home for my poor boys. I should have to leave them to get on as best they could. My home would be your home," said the practical-minded Bridget.

"And a happy one, I am sure, if I had you with me always, Bridget. Think how lonely I should be without you now."

"But we could see each other sometimes," she replied, and then, feeling as if she were holding out an unfailing morsel of comfort, added, "and when the boys are all grown up and provided for, I will give up acting and marry you."

"Alas! I should be old by that time. You are looking so far a-head, my dear little girl; you forget how much older I am than you."

"In some things you are much younger," Bridget said, shaking her head wisely. "And as if I should care for you any the

less because you had grey hairs in your head? If you really thought so, you might despise me."

"You might care for somebody else by that time!"

"Never, never," she said, and saying this, just as naturally and simply as if she had been a five-year old child, she turned to him and sealed the promise with a kiss.

But all this new cheerfulness and confidence only put Papillon the more out of heart; even her kiss was unwelcome, because it showed that his hopes were defeated. What could he say on his own behalf? How could he win her from her single-minded resolve?

"Bridget," he began, speaking very seriously, and looking straight into her large, loving, candid eyes. "Just listen to me for a minute. I think we do not as yet half understand each other. When I

ask you to marry me, it is because I love you better than anyone else in the world, and even the most selfish of us are ready to sacrifice something for those we love. I should not expect you to neglect your young brothers on my account. I would willingly give up to them some of the time and thought that you would otherwise spend on me; I would help them by every means in my power, and be a faithful friend to them as long as I live. Do you not believe this?"

"Yes," poor Bridget said gratefully, feeling sure that she should never be able to make him understand her gratitude, and beginning at last to realize what perplexity, and perhaps sorrow, her wishes would bring on both. "But I could not do my duty to you and them. I could not make their home my home, if I were married to you. I do love you dearly; I

have said so, I cannot bear to vex you, or to appear ungrateful——”

“ Ah, do not let us talk of gratitude, or we shall quarrel ; if I am kind to you, it is out of pure, downright selfishness. I want to please you, to make you happy, to make you happier with me than with anyone else——”

“ And so I am, but that is not a reason for neglecting my poor boys. I must do what is best for them.”

“ And must that be what is worst for me, Bridget? I think your poor boys hardly want you more than I do,” Papillon said, looking very disconsolate indeed.

“ But Hilary has been with me ever since he was a baby, and the others need me all the more now that they are growing up, and going into the world. Oh! Mr. Papillon,” and here she burst out crying afresh, “ I cannot forsake them—even for you.”

"Would it be forsaking them?" Papillon urged gently. "Would it not be providing two friends for them in the place of one?"

"They would lose me all the same," Bridget answered, drying her tears and sitting upright in her chair, determined to be eloquent. She was beginning to realize the strength and pertinacity of this new kind of love on Papillon's part, beginning to foresee how much more difficult her intense liking for him would make the struggle, unless settled now, for once and for ever; she *must* show how impossible it was for her to act in accordance with her duty and, at the same time, with his inclinations.

"They would lose me all the same," she said, "and they would have no one to take my place. Aunt Helwyse is sure to marry soon, Aunt Emmie says so; she would not want Ambrose then, and who could take

care of him as his own sister? They have always minded me, from the time they were quite little—I am so much older, you know—and I promised mamma before she died that I would act a mother's part to them. How could I know what was going on in their thoughts if I married you, and only saw them now and then? Ah! Mr. Papillon, you do not know what it is to see anyone you love dearly take to drinking like poor papa. It would kill me if the boys came to that, or any other harm, through fault of mine."

And saying this, she looked so sorrowful and so perplexed, that Papillon now only wanted to comfort her, and see her look her old self. Her unselfishness was making him unselfish too—what so communicative as a noble impulse!—and he wanted to show her that he also was capable of devotion, if in inferior degree to her own.

"Dear child," he said, speaking playfully, because he did not wish to pain her by the sight of his own distress, "let us not talk any more about it to-night, or make any change in our present plans. We will go back to London to-morrow, and see Mrs. Bramstone at once. If she is encouraging, you shall begin your studies without delay;" and seeing how her face brightened under his speech, added, still more playfully—"And when you have made your fortune, and settled your brothers in life, then, my dear, we will be married."

Bridget little knew what a bitter feeling of disappointment was hidden under these light-hearted words. She only knew that a great weight was lifted off her mind, and saying, "I think you are the kindest person in the world," at once changed the conversation. As she could not yield to

his wishes, how much better for them both to forget all that had been said, and go on in the old happy way! To herself the task was easy. Her relations with him had been hitherto so delightful that she could not conceive of any change in them that should not be for the worse. She had never thought of love and marriage as likely to form a part of her own life; she had hardly ever thought of these things at all, except after the most childish fashion. Were the boys all grown up, she felt that she could marry Papillon without a second thought, but they would need her protecting care and guidance for years to come, and she could never forsake Hilary.

This offer of marriage coming from Papillon seemed, to Bridget's unromantic young mind, just as natural as Patrick's to Kathleen, made when they were all

sitting under the trees in Highgate Wood ;
only how much more inconvenient !

When Patrick was grown up and able to maintain a wife, there could be nothing to prevent him from marrying Kathleen ; but how could she dream of marrying for the present ? She knew what boys were, this poor, motherly, much experienced Bridget, and was not going to abandon them to the snares and temptations of the world just because inclination might lead the other way. And then it was impossible to leave Hilary. She must certainly live away from him for a year or two, but when once her training was over, and she should begin to earn money, all these painful separations would come to an end.

So she put away all disturbing thoughts, and being so far deceived by Papillon as to suppose that he could put them away as

easily, she began to talk of common topics in the common way.

This vexed, nay, irritated him, all the more so that it made her feel the difference between his age and her own. This bright young girl could afford to dream of a future, to him as far off and visionary as the mountains in the moon, but with himself it could not be so. He must realize his wishes and aspirations soon, or not at all. Ten years were little indeed for Bridget to look forward to, but to him they were all in all, for when they were over, his youth would be over. It must be remembered, that he was a man of the world for the first time really in love, whilst Bridget, a mere child in many ways, was, above all, a child in one—she had no idea of what love meant as Papillon meant it. She could not, therefore, conceive why things should not go on as

smoothly as before, seeing that they should surely be married some day!

"You had better take up your abode with Mrs. Bramstone for a time," he said, before they separated for the night. "You will then have much more of her time and attention than you would have otherwise, and at the end of two or three weeks she will be able to give an opinion."

Bridget looked a little downcast.

"Shall I see you sometimes?"

"Of course. I will take you out for a walk every day."

"That will be delightful. And may I go home to see Uncle Bryan when he comes back from the sea? I am sure he has been much more ill than Aunt Helwyse says."

"Certainly. And, remember, on your birthday we are all going to take Hilary to the pantomime."

At such a prospect Bridget looked ecstatic.

“ Yes. That will be on the twenty-eighth of January—six weeks from to-day, exactly. He talks of nothing else. I have never seen a pantomime in my life. I shall be as pleased as Hilary.”

This little conversation took place in the hall, whilst Papillon was wrapping himself up for the run back to his hotel, Bridget holding hat and stick, like the trusty handmaiden she was. Hitherto the “good night” had generally been accompanied by a kiss, Papillon affecting to regard her as a child still, and to be treated accordingly. Why was it, Bridget wondered, that he merely shook hands with her to-night, then hurried off, as if glad to get the parting over. She put away her work, and went to bed a little sadly, fearing lest she had vexed him past forgiveness after all.

CHAPTER VIII.

HELWYSE "AT HOME."

AS soon as Bryan had mended a little, he was carried off by Emilia to the sea, she returning a week before him, in order to help Helwyse with the moving. Christmas was at hand, the tempting little cottage, at the fabulously low rent, would be surely lost to them if they waited till Lady Day, and both Bryan and Emilia were dying with anxiety to begin their new plan of existence. The cottage, though small, was large enough to hold them. Instead of having two parlours, they must content themselves with one. The look out was not to be compared with that they should

lose, but what were all these things in comparison to the comfort of living within their means? And when all material wants were satisfied, Hilary and the little girls had to be educated. Patrick, too, would not be able to earn his living for several years to come, and if Helwyse were to marry, they must give Ambrose a home.

“And repay Helwyse her loan,” Emilia would say over and over again. She was proud in her dealings with her sister-in-law, and determined that the money should be paid before Helwyse’s wedding-day, whenever that might befall. In fact, there was every possible reason why they should give up doing what was comfortable, and do what was prudent instead. Whilst Emilia occupied herself with all kinds of small economies, Helwyse looked more to the poetic side of things. She wanted to

make Bryan pleased with his new home, and to feel that his new life need be none the less cheerful because it began with some privations. She put new books on the shelves, fresh pictures on the walls, flower-stands in the window, shrubs in the garden, removing painful associations here, planting new hopes there, embellishing every corner. Have we not all such superstitions and symbols? Is there not in every room some piece of furniture which occasion has sanctified in our memories for ever, some landscape out of every window we look on with wholly different feelings from the rest? These things are part of our existence, and we cannot separate ourselves from them.

Had Emilia gained her will, the walls of their new home would have been bare and melancholy as those of a penitentiary.

“Why should we take so much trouble

about this poverty-stricken little place?" she said. "It is a mere workman's cottage, after all. It is through our own fault that we have come to it."

But Helwyse was determined that the workman's cottage should be as hopeful and pretty as love and ingenuity could make it, and that Bryan's home-coming should be welcomed with all kinds of happy looking forward. He was not to lose that small place of refuge he had so much valued in the former house, a tiny room being converted into what was dignified by the name of study, for his use. Here Helwyse had displayed all her skill. The room was so small that it was difficult to find space for even the necessary chair, table, and book-shelves without an appearance of cramming. Pictures were not to be thought of in so small a space, but a little wall decoration would give

rather than take away from its size, so she set to work to cover them with flowers and arabesques.

It happened that this task had been put off to the last moment, and on the day preceding Bryan's return she was busier than ever, whilst Emilia was no less fully occupied in putting down stair carpets, hanging window curtains, and other final arrangements. The children were all away ; they had all the whole house to themselves, and, it is hardly necessary to say, gave little thought either to their meals or personal appearance. They were both hard at work, they expected no more formidable visitor than Mr. Starffe—why should they not turn up their sleeves and put on aprons, like any ordinary housemaids ?

This is, in fact, what had been done, and certainly Helwyse never looked lovelier

than in that careless costume. She had pinned up her blue serge skirt displaying a scarlet cloth petticoat, and the daintiest foot in the world; further to protect her dress, she wore a holland apron, by no means unbecoming either, whilst, having no painting blouse at hand, and being particularly anxious not to spoil her sleeves, she had pinned them back also, showing more of the slender wrist and rounded arm than usual. Thus attired, and singing to herself in happy unconcern all the time, she was working away on Bryan's walls when a wholly unexpected interruption happened.

Helwyse, as has been said, was busily engaged at the top of the house; Emilia, no less busy, remained at the bottom, and when a quite unfamiliar knock was heard at the front door, was searching for carpet nails in the kitchen.

"It must be a mistake, or, perhaps, Dr. Brown inquiring after Bryan," Emilia thought. "Well, Mary Jane is in the hall, and will know what to say."

Mary Jane, the maid-of-all-work, would have known quite well what to say to the doctor ; but the sight of a hansom cab, and an imposing-looking gentleman on the doorstep, demanding if Miss Fleming were "at home," utterly disconcerted her.

"I mean, at home to visitors, you understand," said Mr. Kingsbury, for it was he, and saying this, he could not resist a smile at the expression of utter puzzlement that had taken possession of the girl. It had never occurred to her inexperienced mind that there were two ways of being at home ; either Miss Fleming was in the house or she was not, and the former being the case, she invited the visitor to "be so kind as to step inside," and follow her upstairs.

"Master's coming home to-morrow, you see, sir," she said, apologetically, as he stumbled over a roll of stair-carpet on the way, "and we are all working like slaves to get the house ready. Put down your head, if you please, sir, for the ceiling is very low in the upper story."

Now when the door opened suddenly, and Helwyse, looking down from her perch—for she was sitting on a pair of steps—beheld the tall figure of the artist standing in the doorway, her first impulse was of pure, unalloyed pleasure. She had not seen him since making that railway journey from Dover to London together, and so much had happened afterwards, that she could hardly believe it was only a few weeks ago. How pleasant to see him again! How grateful she felt to him for coming!

Blushing out of unmitigated joy, then,

she descended the steps and said, gaily and cordially,

"It was very kind of you to find your way here. My brother has just moved, and I am turning this room into a little sanctum for him by way of a pleasant surprise. What do you think of my work?"

"Very pretty indeed," Kingsbury answered, glancing with a well-concealed contempt round the tiny apartment. Then he added, looking a little embarrassed, "But I will not stay, as you are so much engaged. I only came to inquire after your health. All your Kensington friends are getting anxious."

"I am quite well, and intend to return home the day after to-morrow," Helwyse said, again reddening, this time from a dawning consciousness that her house-maid-like attire and homely surround-

ings were disagreeable and disconcerting to him. Embarrassment is infectious, especially in two people who fancy themselves in love with each other, and seeing Kingsbury put out of countenance by circumstances she would otherwise have left unnoticed, Helwyse, in her turn, became ill at ease. Whilst they stood thus, interchanging, for the first time in their lives, artificial common-places, she was gradually, and not without shyness, improving matters with regard to her toilette, unpinning her sleeves, letting down her skirt, and taking off her apron. But all this being done, she felt painfully awakened to those disadvantageous accidents not so easily to be repaired. When her visitor glanced with evident amazement and dejection at the little garden to which she proudly drew his attention, its dimensions immediately lessened in her eyes, and when they descend-

ed to the parlour, and he looked round inquiringly, much as to say—Is it possible human beings can find breathing space here?—it occurred to her as a revelation that the place was really very small and dismal after all.

The parlour had not yet been wholly put in order. There was a pile of muslin curtains on the table, a heap of books—Helwyse's last present to Bryan—on the floor, and pictures, as yet unhung, placed here and there. Still one might have supposed that Kingsbury, though of very tall stature indeed, could have found a seat and made himself at home in Helwyse's company, in spite of such trifling drawbacks as these.

But he stood on the hearthrug looking irresolute and uncomfortable.

“Pray sit down,” Helwyse said, so infected by his unfamiliar manner that she

hardly knew whether she most wished him to go or stay. "I really have finished working for to-day."

"Indeed, I must be going, Thank you very much," Kingsbury answered, "I have an appointment in Park Lane at five o'clock, and I had no idea it would take me so long to get here."

"It is a very long way indeed from Hornsey to Park Lane," poor Helwyse said, looking positively guilty.

"And this particular road is so hard to find, I was almost in despair when I turned the corner," he added. "But I am very glad that I succeeded in fulfilling my errand, and that I can carry so good a report of you to my friends. I was near forgetting one important message, however, with which I was charged, Lady Wendover and her daughters are dying to see your studio. When may I present them to you?"

His words were undoing all that bright tissue of fancies she had woven at the first sound of his voice and sight of his face a few minutes back. He had not come on his own account, then, but had been sent, and sent not to satisfy his own anxieties about her health, but those of other people. His friends, rather than himself, were anxious to see her and her studio.

"I shall be back the day after to-morrow. Any time will do after then," she said.

"But you will be busier on some days than others, and Lady Maud is anxious to make your acquaintance. May we not be privileged with a fixed hour?"

Helwyse had heard not a little of Lady Maud, the clever, high-spirited beauty, whose name had been linked with Kingsbury's two years ago. Lady Maud was considered no longer quite young, though

still handsome and a wit. She painted well in an indolent* way, loved the company of artists better than anything, and had tried to make Helwyse's acquaintance before. But the young artist did not feel enthusiastic about this versatile lady, who talked complacently of working in her "studio," and, at the same time, was seen at all the most fashionable entertainments of a London season. Lady Maud rode, drove, danced, and accepted invitations from morning till night, yet found time to take lessons in painting, attend scientific lectures, and otherwise improve her mind. All this Helwyse had heard of, and she had a natural dread of fashionable ladies zealous about improving their minds. "Avoid Lady Maud as you would the plague," Papillon had said more than once. "She will drop in upon you at all hours of the day, just to paint for an hour, and you will not be able

to refuse, for every day she wastes will be repaid with an invitation you are flattered to accept. Once in for this sort of thing, my dear Miss Fleming, and your career as an artist is ruined."

Still to refuse Kingsbury's request now would have been downright unfriendly, so she said, though without much warmth,

"By all means come on Wednesday afternoon, then. I shall have got my studio a little into order by that time. As yet, I have touched nothing since my return."

"True—I forgot. Perhaps I have asked what is unreasonable. Shall we wait a week or two?"

"No, I shall be quite settled down by that time, and shall expect you," Helwyse answered.

Then he rose, and seemed on the point of going. Having pressed him to stay once, she said no more.

"I am afraid you have had an anxious time," he said, as they stood in the narrow little entrance-hall together. He had not noticed before how weary and dispirited she looked, and, in fact, she had not looked weary or dispirited a quarter of an hour ago. His unexpected change of manner—coldness it was not, nor exactly embarrassment, nor wholly aloofness, yet a mixture of all three—had caused a feeling, a misgiving, a heart-sickening of disappointment such as makes us on a sudden unlike our old selves.

"My brother was very ill for a time, and I am unused to nursing, that is all," she said, trying to smile in the old way. "I shall be well again directly I sit down at my easel."

But there was a wistfulness, an undefined sadness underlying the words, that caused him, in his turn, to wonder what

had so changed her. He did not know—how should he?—that she was wondering exactly at the same moment what had so changed him. Thus the two misread and misapprehended each other.

The little maid-of-all-work was not forthcoming, so Helwyse moved forward to open the door for him. They were alone, and he had therefore ample opportunity for saying the few eager words of lover-like concern which were on his lips and in his heart, and which would have brought tears of joy to her eyes. Yet they were left unsaid. He did not feel quite sure just then that he ought to say them, to give, in fact, a pledge of his lover-like behaviour to come. Perhaps he had gone to Hornsey with the intention of saying all this, and something more; he almost felt that it was so. But the altered circumstances in which he found her, the humble-

ness and poorness of her surroundings, the evidence of narrow means and anxious economies on every side, had taken him by surprise, shocked, mortified him. He could not help feeling, moreover, as if Helwyse were doing herself wrong by wearing an apron and turning up her sleeves. He was vexed with her for putting herself in what appeared to him an undignified position. Why should she make herself a domestic slave in her brother's house? Why should she open the door for him instead of ringing for the servant to do it? With a mere hand-shake, and an ordinary greeting, he jumped into his cab and drove off in a frame of mind that was far from enviable.

Helwyse returned to her work with a look of perplexity, almost of pain, in her sweet face. The short afternoon was waning, only a narrow orange band over

the purply, brown heights of Highgate showed where the sun had set. There was no other light or colour in the landscape, and as Helwyse gazed on it now, she found it dreary. Half an hour back she had gazed on the same picture with a heart so light as to make her wonder what made it so. She had looked back to Bryan's return and her own going home with the fondest, brightest hopes. How delightful to have Bryan well and happy once more ! How delightful to be in the midst of her friends and her work again ! Now she felt as if even Bryan's happier circumstances could not make everything right, as if to go back to her studio would not bring her joy, pure and unadulterated. The dusk was fast growing into gloom ; so putting away her palette and brushes till the morrow, she stood by the window, looking out, full of vague, restless

thoughts. The little fire had died out, and she knew that tea and a blazing hearth were awaiting her below, but she felt unwilling to relinquish the luxury of reverie as yet. She wanted to be alone, to reassure herself, to think over what had happened till it no longer gave her any uneasiness. How childish, how foolish of her to feel troubled about what, after all, might only be the conjurings of her own imagination! Why should she dwell on Mr. Kingsbury's visit at all? Why should she wonder whether it had pleased him or not?

At last she went downstairs, quite prepared for Emilia's affectionate inquisitiveness and garrulity on the subject of the artist's visit. What a pity he had not come a day or two later, when the stair carpets would be down, and everything tidy! And how friendly of him to come at all! The

cab would cost him half a sovereign, at least, but she supposed he was rich, and people said—well, Helwyse knew what people said about his liking for her! To these various remarks and inuendoes Helwyse replied briefly, and after a matter-of-fact fashion. Mr. Kingsbury had come to deliver one or two messages, she said; and then, by way of changing the conversation, she began to talk of Lady Maud, and from Lady Maud went on to Mrs. Cornwell, and the rest of her Kensington friends, of whom Emilia liked to hear.

CHAPTER IX.

A GLIMMER OF LIGHT.

THE next morning, when Helwyse was working away in Bryan's room, another wholly unexpected visitor made his appearance—this time not of a kind to set Emilia lamenting about the stair carpets, or Helwyse unpinning her sleeves. Just as she had begun to work, Freeland was announced, above all other persons the most welcome at that moment. He would help Helwyse with her decorations, and so enable her to finish the room before Bryan's return. Could anything have happened more opportunely? Helwyse had only seen him, moreover, for a minute or two since

her home-coming, nearly two months ago, and there were many things to be planned and talked over. A cloud still dimmed her bright face. She had not yet got over the vexatiousness of Kingsbury's visit—a vexatiousness all the more insupportable because she could give no reason for it; and Freeland, knowing nothing of this, only seeing her a little pensive, and somewhat pale, naturally attributed these changes to her recent anxiety and nursing. He was the last person in the world to cause anyone he loved pain, simply because it might relieve his own feelings to be moody or unaccountable. So, for her sake, though he was in no radiant humour himself, he brightened up and laughed and talked gaily. He could not bear to see her unlike the joyous Helwyse of former days, and perhaps it was easier for him to assume a light-heartedness he did not feel,

because it was months since he had interchanged as much as half a dozen words with her.

He had come in the firm intention of being, as he felt that he ought to be, cold, reserved, self-composed, but her sweet presence and friendly, incautious speeches undid all these stern resolutions, and, by little and little, brought back all the old joy and adoration. They brought back, moreover, the old faith in her. Freeland, in that bitter disappointment and intense feeling of isolation which had taken possession of him when he saw Helwyse living more and more in the world had often been unjust towards her; now he felt this, reproached himself for it, and was ready to do anything by way of reparation. Helwyse spoiled by flattery, Helwyse of the world, worldly, Helwyse drifting gradually from her old friends and

her former simplicity of life!—how could he ever have put such thoughts into shape? How could he for a moment have accused her of neglecting her first, and therefore her highest, duties?

When he saw her thus occupied, working away as if for dear life, in order that Bryan's home should be bright and tasteful, when he realised the life she had been leading for the last few weeks, nursing her brother, helping Emilia in housewifely cares, he felt that he had hitherto done her scant justice. He wanted now nothing so much as to show his love, his appreciation, his entire, unwavering trust. But what was there left for him to do? Helwyse was too rich in friends and fortune to need him any longer. He had felt more than ever that a time was coming when perhaps their friendly relations must be wholly changed. And that

very morning he had come to tell her of a resolve which would separate them for years, and which he knew she would learn with sorrow.

Finding a look of trouble in her face when he entered, he put off the communication till she began to talk and laugh naturally. "After all," he thought, with a sinking of the heart, "how little any decision of mine can matter to her! She will be happy wherever I am."

"I have not yet told my errand," he said at last, rather hesitatingly. "I came this morning to tell you that in all probability I shall start for India in April."

"Ah!" Helwyse cried, laying down paint-brush and palette, "I am very glad—I am very sorry—that you have so decided."

"Then you had already heard about the matter?"

"Yes; Mr. Kingsbury told me of a

Government commission being organised, in order to send out artists and draughtsmen to make drawings at Delhi and other places ; but at the time he mentioned it, nothing was settled."

"The scheme is quite settled now, and the leading post has been offered to me, mainly, I believe, through Mr. Kingsbury's intervention. It was friendly of him."

"Mr. Kingsbury never loses an opportunity of doing a friendly thing," Helwyse answered, taking up her paint-brush and resuming work. Just because she had felt a little irritated with the artist a short time back, she was all the more determined to do him justice now.

Recalling the interview of yesterday, it seemed to her unworthy of Edward Kingsbury to resent such trifles as her homely surroundings, and she reproached herself for imputing his embarrassment to so poor a

cause. If, indeed, he could feel ashamed for her because of her brother's straitened circumstances, if her presence pleased him less in Emilia's humble parlour than in Mrs. Cornwell's splendid drawing-room, then she must set down his sensibility as narrowness, and his personal liking as hardly to be called by that name. But it was not so, it could not be, and there were reasons for his haste, preoccupation, and embarrassment, of which she knew nothing.

Freeland looked up when Helwyse said this, and their eyes met.. Why did he look uneasy? she thought. For what reason but one should she blush red as a rose? he asked. Then after that momentary break in the conversation he went on, speaking rapidly and in his usual voice—

“There are many reasons why I should accept such an offer. In the first place, the like opportunity of bettering my for-

tunes would never happen again, not that I care much about money, I earn already more than enough for my wants, but it is only natural for all of us to wish for the power that money brings. I have schemes and ideas to help my fellow-workmen which I could carry out if I were rich, and of which we will talk presently. But again, there is the boy. If you will let him go too, his fortunes are made as well as mine. Why should not Ambrose accompany me?"

"Why not, indeed! If you are good enough to take him!" Helwyse cried. "Could any of us wish for better luck to befall the child than to be always with you, wherever you are."

"It is kind of you to say that, Miss Helwyse. I should be really very sorry to leave him behind, and there is no reason why he should not go. He is not

so young as to suffer from the climate, and we shall not stay at work in the great cities during the excessive heats, but travel on the high lands and mountains."

"How delightful! What wonderful things you will see! I wish I were going too."

"I wish you were," Freeland said very drily, though he reddened to the brow as he spoke. Her head being bent over her work, she was not disconcerted by the blush, whilst the speech accompanying it seemed perfectly natural.

"I have often wondered why some artist has not realized the splendid *terra incognita* awaiting him there," she continued, throwing heart and soul into the subject. "I have neither the breadth nor the imagination requisite for such an achievement; but what a revelation it would be in art! What do we as yet know of those

fabulous cities and temples, those beautiful races, those indescribable trees and flowers Indian travellers speak of? They are all mystery and romance, and only the artist can make them real."

"Quite true; nothing else, I think, could have taken me out of my groove. My field will be necessarily circumscribed, it is true, but the enterprise must, if successful, give fresh impetus in that direction. I own the prospect interests and exhilarates me."

"And you will come home rich and famous! You will do great things. You will win all kinds of honours," Helwyse said, encouragingly. "I am sure you are doing wisely to go."

"I felt convinced that you would approve of my decision," Freeland answered, and this time his voice betrayed him. Those little words upbraided, nay, wounded her.

"I shall be as much a loser as any of your friends by it," she added, anxious to repair her error. "When I say that I approve of your decision, I speak only with reference to yourself and your own interests. Of course I would much rather have you stay."

Freeland was silent. He worked away with his brush, as if the arabesque in hand were absorbing his every thought just then. In reality, he was striving for mastery over himself, trying to keep back the passionate words that were all but on his lips, fighting, almost praying for self-control.

"We shall all miss you sadly, I am sure," Helwyse added, in a voice that was meant to be soothing, "none more so than Mrs. Cornwell, Mr. Kingsbury, and I——"

"What difference can it make to any of you?" Freeland broke out scornfully, al-

most angrily, she thought; that mention of Kingsbury was more than he could bear. “There are plenty who will be thankful to take my place—and earn my wages,” he added, between his teeth. Helwyse had never before seen him so agitated.

“But we have always regarded you as a friend, a valued friend,” she said, putting down her brush and palette, and looking at him appealingly. She saw with pain and surprise that his hands were trembling, and that his eyes were dim with tears, the tears of a man more angry than sorrowful. Trying not to be infected by his emotion, she continued—

“And what you have done for me has been done for friendship, and not for wages. How can I ever repay you for your kindness to the boy and to my brother? You must not scold Mr. Starffe,” this was said with a look of playful deprecation, “he

cannot keep a secret, and I know now who it is who offered to help Bryan, if I had stayed longer away."

"What is that?" Freeland cried, every one of her sweet words falling like burning oil on a wound. "Who else would not have done as much for you? You will miss neither what I have done for hire, nor for——" Love was the word that was on his lips, but he kept it back with a desperate effort, and put another in its place, "nor for friendship. But what a mockery is this so-called friendship between us two! It makes me angry even to hear you utter the name. Looking at it humanly speaking, it ought to be possible. But it is not so, and you only deceive yourself when you think otherwise. Were we friends, as you call it, should we see each other so seldom? Were we friends, should I always wonder, when I talk to you, what I may say, and

what I may not? I am conscious of wrong in speaking so plainly now, though I dare not say half what I fain would do. I cannot——”

Again he checked himself in time, but he was not reddening now. The flush had died from his cheek, leaving it very pale, and his voice was growing calm.

“That makes departure so bitter to me,” he added, conscious of the pain on her face, though he was not looking at her, conscious, moreover, that the pain he might inflict could bring no possible good, either to herself or to him, yet, in spite of his love for her, not being able to keep his peace. “Had there been anything like friendship between you and me, I need not have kept silence all these years. I could at least have unburdened myself to you, shown myself in my true colours to one person in the world. It is the weight of secresy, the

obligation of silence, that crushes me. I am going away—who knows when to return?—yet none of all the so-called friends I leave behind, know my heart and my life as it has been. No one—you least of all—can know what I have suffered."

He rose from his seat, threw aside brush and palette, and sitting down by the table near the door, leaned his head on his hands. What could Helwyse do but try to reassure, to comfort, to soothe him? Something of which she did not know lay at the bottom of this despair, yet she could but do her best to console him.

She went to his side very gently, and seeing that what she had suspected was true, and that this healthy-natured, joyous, self-collected man was indeed shedding tears, she laid one hand on his arm, the other on his burning, tightly-clasped fingers, and said in the tenderest tone,

"Oh ! my kind friend, you must be happy. Cannot I help you as you have so often helped me ?"

But the action and the words had quite a different effect from that she had hoped. Had she been his bitterest enemy he could not have shaken off her touch more desperately, nay, rudely, nor have turned away with more apparent repulsion. He sprang from his seat, seized his hat, and said, without looking at her,

"For Heaven's sake, do not be kind to me. Do not speak in that way to me. I cannot bear it !"

Then he made for the threshold, about to go, but Helwyse, still far from comprehending his agitation, put her hand on the door, and looking straight into his face with her sweet eyes brimful of tears, said very sadly,

"I know that I have been very ungrate-



ful. I have never done anything for you, and none of all my friends have served me as you have done. Is there nothing I can do for you now?"

He stood irresolute, not knowing whether to follow his first impulse and go away, or remain, pouring all the pent-up confessions of years at her feet. But the more she began to be troubled for his sake, the more anxious he was growing to spare her further. Had she been calm and self-collected, he would certainly have staid. Her tears and self-reproach decided him to go.

"No one can help me," he answered; "but think no more of what I have said. I am not master of myself to-day. I had better go home—"

"Stay a little while," she urged, "you look quite ill. You have, perhaps, been working too hard—"

"No, indeed I am well enough, but I cannot stay just now; it is unkind to ask me," he said in an impatient, almost in an angry tone.

"Then you will come some evening and see Bryan, will you not?" she added, holding out her hand, almost thankful that he had really made up his mind to go now. His strange manner, the alternating flush and pallor of his cheek, his unaccountable trembling, frightened her. She thought he was about to be ill, and determined to have news of him next day.

He hardly seemed to know that she was speaking to him, but without a word turned to go. Then glancing back as he reached the stair-head, and seeing her stand where he had left her, watching after him with an indescribable look of sympathy and compassion, he could not help further

betraying himself in spite of all his resolves to the contrary.

For an instant returning to her side, and for an instant clasping her hand in his, he cried—

“Pray forgive me. I shall never forgive myself for having caused you pain. I want you to be more happy than anything else in the world;” and then he went away.

Helwyse returned to her work as she had done the day before, after Kingsbury’s visit, uneasy and out of heart. What had happened to Freeland, making him so utterly unlike his former self? One moment, she said—he loves me. The next, she said—he loves me not. The thing seemed to her alternately probable, improbable, not at all likely, impossible. What made her feel it impossible was Freeland’s very outspokenness and frankness. He had behaved

like a brother, a friend, a chivalrous protector, but never like a lover ; and if he had loved her all these years, could he have so long kept silence ? She tried to recall a single instance in which his conduct could have been interpreted otherwise, and it gave her a feeling of intense satisfaction that it was so. She could not tolerate the thought that Freeland's generous, deep, honest nature should be unwillingly wronged by her. No, it was not —it could not be. He had doubtless troubles and conflicts of which she knew nothing ; there might be many things of which he wished to speak to her, but lacked courage. He was scrupulous, nay, over-sensitive on the subject of their different positions in life, and, perhaps, she had never understood how much he had suffered by reason of his false position, for false position it had been, in spite of

his own proud, high-spirited conduct, and his friends' good-will and recognition. An accomplished man, a learned man, a man possessed of lofty principles and strong, well-balanced character, Freeland had seldom been treated, except by herself and Papillon, on the terms of equal friendship. Certainly, in some respects, Freeland had been the victim of so-called conventionalities, in other words, of the world, though he had ever appeared the last person to see it. Helwyse had always thought of him as possessed of an eminently healthy, happy nature; few people seemed so fully to realize the intention of their lives as he, and surely this is one of the best tests of happiness! Why was he suddenly caustic, unfair, uncharitable? What had made him bitter and resentful even to her?

That Arthur Freeland should be what is called in love with her, was the last thing

Helwyse would have regarded as an affront. She liked, respected, and admired him far too well not to feel any return of these sentiments as an honour; whatever Freeland loved must be akin to himself. He could not fall prostrate before a mean or unworthy idol; and so, like any other woman, Helwyse gloried in any preference on his part that should fall short of love. She would not for worlds cause him the pain of wasted affection, and, after putting one thing with another, and thinking about him for a very long time, she came to the conclusion that on this score she need not reproach herself.

She felt, nevertheless, a little natural trepidation at the idea of meeting him again, and was glad that she should not see him at least for several days.

But for another occurrence, Helwyse would perhaps have stayed on at Hornsey

till Christmas, so undesirous was she of returning to her pretty home, in other words, encountering Freeland and Kingsbury.

CHAPTER X.

“ MY GRANDMOTHER’S NECKLACE.”

POOR Helwyse! What had she done to be so hardly used by the Fates just now? It seemed as if they were bent upon punishing her for having once been too happy, since in what other respect had she sinned? Hardly had she recovered from the perturbation into which Freeland’s visit had thrown her, when the door was tapped softly, and Mr. Starffe entered, beaming upon her so cordially, and sitting down beside her with such evident pleasure, that she felt quite grateful to him for coming. With Mr. Starffe, at least, she could talk

naturally and smoothly about Bryan's return, Ambrose's prospects, Bridget, and other family topics, and it was a relief to have some one to chat to her at that moment.

" You will not mind if I go on working, will you ?" she said, in the friendliest manner. " I am most impatient to finish Bryan's room before he returns ; and I can talk better than if I were idle. Take that chair by the window, please, then we can see each other."

The curate obeyed with alacrity, but though he took the chair assigned to him, he contrived to sit so as to have a very good view of her, whilst his own face was in the shade. Such retiringness seemed unaccountable, as never before had Helwyse seen him so well-dressed ; in fact, he was too well dressed for a curate not to be noticeably so, and with true feminine

curiosity she glanced at the superfine quality of the cloth, the brand-newness of his hat, the coquettish tint of his kid gloves, and, lastly, the rose-bud in his button-hole. Then, having also glanced inquisitively at the careful arrangement of his locks, and his holiday appearance in general, she took up her brush and began to work and talk.

For half an hour things went delightfully. Helwyse talked of Mr. Starffe's cure, his daily duties among the poor, his difficulties and rewards, bringing him out as no one else could do, making him feel that with her he was at his very best, that here, at least, was a woman who sympathised with his aspirations and appreciated his strivings after alike the perishable good and the higher life. Then, finding him suddenly grown pensive and painfully self-conscious, Helwyse turned the conver-

sation into other channels: she chatted of her recent travels, the children, the newspapers, and so on, the curate putting in a word or two abstractedly now and then.

"It is very kind of you to allow me to sit here whilst you paint," he said, when conversation had so far flagged that Helwyse was beginning to wish he would go.

"But I fear it is growing tiresome for you. Shall we go downstairs, and see Emilia?" she asked.

"No, on no account interrupt your work. Pray continue, and pay no attention to me," Mr. Starffe answered, greatly embarrassed. "I shall be really much obliged if you will allow me to stay a little longer."

"Certainly," Helwyse answered. "Will you read something to me?"

"Anything you like, dear Miss Helwyse. Pray command me. I am so happy

whenever I can render you a service."

"Do read to me, then. You are a scholar, and I always come to you, you know, to help me with my classical subjects. Will you take that big brown book from the shelf—an old Ovid Bryan used at school—turn to page one hundred, and translate for me the story of Pygmalion?"

"You could not have given me a pleasanter task," cried the curate, for he knew his Ovid by heart, and looked upon Helwyse's choice of a subject as providential. He could not himself have hit on a theme more appropriate to his feelings, or, at least, more opportune, he thought, and found the book and the passage with eager fingers. In clear, though somewhat pedantic language, he rendered Ovid's delicious description of the sculpture adorning Pygmalion's marble bride. Then, going

over the whole, he picked out lines here and there, any one of which he felt would answer his purpose.

“Ah!” he said, when he came to the “soft dyed carpet for her feet, the rainbow-tinted shells for toys, the pearls, the gold, and the gems”—“what a fortunate person was this Pygmalion to possess offerings worthy the object of his affections! Might I be permitted to mention——” Then, seeing that Helwyse had turned her head suddenly, and was looking at him with no little surprise, he stammered very much, and finally got out the words—“I do not know if I ever told you that I possess a very beautiful necklace—my grandmother’s necklace, in fact. It is really a valuable trinket, and contains some very fine pearls, besides several rubies of undoubted excellence.”

“No, indeed,” Helwyse said, smiling, and

not in the least discovering the appropriateness of the remark. "I should like to see it very much."

"Would you really? I shall be so pleased to show it to you. This description of Ovid's made me think of it. It seems a sad pity such things should be laid aside in a bachelor's drawer!"

Having achieved this speech to his own infinite amazement, and finding the ground still firm under his feet, and the ceiling not opening above his head, he added,

"But I have other trinkets that belonged to my grandmother also, a pendant of Indian gold, beautifully designed, and a very pretty bracelet. Oh! Miss Helwyse, would you be so very kind as to allow me to present them to you?"

"Why should you do that?" Helwyse asked innocently. Her thoughts had wandered back to her work.

"Why should I do that? You must know why. For the same reason that Pygmalion offered all his treasures to his statue—because—"

Had a bullet gone through the curate's body at that moment, he could not have felt more desperate as he got out the words—"Because I love you."

Helwyse blushed crimson, and trying to go on with her arabesque, not venturing as much as to glance at him, she said,

"I am very sorry."

"It has been so for years," the curate went on, determined to plead his cause for once and for all, and that Helwyse should at least know the fervour of his admiration, and the intense sincerity of his affection. It might make no difference to him; he had perhaps hoped little from this interview, but the field was open to all, and having reached that stage of

feeling when incertitude becomes too painful to be borne, he decided to end it at once.

During the last few weeks, they had been constantly thrown together, and Helwyse was naturally the last person to foresee the consequences. It was Mr. Starffe who had enticed her from Bryan's bedside for a walk, Mr. Starffe who had performed errands, had sat up with Bryan in order to let Emilia and Helwyse rest, Mr. Starffe who had acted a brotherly part to the two sisters. When Bryan went off to the sea, they had still occasion for the curate's friendly help. Hardly a day passed that he was not invited to tea and to supper. It was little wonder that he now saw himself on the eve of a final separation with dismay. Those happy days of perpetually renewed intercourse could not be expected to return. She

would go back to her old brilliant life in the world, and be farther removed from him than ever. Surely such an opportunity of speaking to her would never occur again.

“I have loved you for years—did you never guess it?” he continued, very shyly. “I could not hope much—how could I—seeing how differently we were situated—myself a humble curate, you already so rich in fame and fortune? But a man can only offer what he has, and in my case it is so little as to be hardly worth mentioning. I should not have ventured to speak now, but I have just been promised an increase of stipend, which will bring my means up to just upon two hundred pounds a year!”

“I am very glad,” Helwyse said; then, checking herself, added—“For your own sake, I mean,” and she looked so sorry

for him as she said this, that he tried to hurry over what else he had to say.

" You think, perhaps, I am very presumptuous in speaking to you about my feelings at all, and I should most likely never have dreamed of it, but we have seen each other so often of late, and you are always so sweet and kind to me—pray do not think I mean to reproach you! —that I have allowed myself to be carried away till I did not in the least know where I was. I began to dream all kinds of foolish things. I saw myself coming home from my parish rounds to find you there, walking by your side when you had done painting, reading to you in the evenings, helping you with your mythological subjects. And what a pride and a joy to me to see you so praised and rewarded for your beautiful gifts, to watch the people admiring your pictures on the gallery walls,

to read such flattering things about them in the papers ! I went on dreaming in this way, till it seemed all but true, as if I had only to walk from one room to another to find something I knew to be there. Was it not absurd of me to build such castles in the air ? But it made me very happy to build them—it did indeed."

" You have ever been one of my kindest friends," Helwyse said, feeling obliged to say something ; " and that but makes me appear all the more ungrateful. Oh ! I am grieved that I must appear so."

" Pray do not mention it," the curate said, greatly touched and agitated. " I am sorry indeed to have made you grieve. It is not worth while, really. But I will leave off talking and go now. I will indeed." Then he rose and took up his hat.

What could Helwyse say ? Yet he stood there evidently waiting for a word.

The hat was going round in his hands, and he was looking nervously at the door, willing, yet how loth, to put an end to the interview.

“God bless you!” she said at last. Whereupon he repeated the words; then, with a look of meek, yearning fondness, he laid one hand lightly on her pretty head, and called down upon it a beautiful benediction, quoted from the service of his church. He could not have quitted her in more touching fashion; and the action accompanying the words, the hand so tenderly spread over the fair hair, the pious face lifted so reverently towards Heaven, the smile of mixed ecstasy and renunciation irradiating the ascetic lips, gave to his farewell the solemnity of an act of worship.

Helwyse could not speak, and her eyes were full of tears; he knew what was

in her heart, and went to his humble home a sadder, but hardly a poorer or a less grateful man than he had left it.

He had, at any rate, spoken out with only the shadow of a hope to begin with, but with a determination to do himself justice, to let Helwyse know all the tenderness, devotion, and aspiration that were in him. He should never find another woman to be compared with her. They would probably be more and more divided as years went on. But at least they would never misunderstand each other, and she knew where to find a true friend if ever she needed one. Thus the curate consoled himself in his new loneliness and in that overwhelming sense of disappointment which overtook him when the first excitement of the interview had passed away. His bettered circumstances seemed to bring him no additional happiness.

ness now. He almost wished things had remained as they were, since added means made it incumbent on him to marry, and how could he marry? When his vicar had told him of his good fortune, and said, with a friendly pat on the shoulder, "Come, Starffe, a clergyman who can support a wife, has no excuse for keeping single, so I shall expect to publish your banns before next Christmas, and so see you setting a good example to the younger people of the parish," he had smiled and blushed, thinking of Helwyse. But such advice could not cause delicious perturbation again, and when next the vicar should give it, he determined to mention the domestic claims which might surely excuse him for prolonging his bachelorhood a little longer.

Helwyse, on her part, was deeply grieved, and, it must be admitted,

not a little mortified and perplexed into the bargain. On the heels of Kingsbury's visit had followed Freeland's, the one quite as painful and unaccountable as the other. On the heels of Freeland's had followed this declaration from the curate, and whilst there was no kind of mystery about it, there was none the less reason for sorrow, self-reproach, and dismay. She could not help blaming herself for having accepted so much kindness at his hands, for saying and doing a hundred things she would never have dreamed of, had she for a moment suspected his preference. But the mischief was past and done now, and least of all from herself could healing and comfort come. She thought of his arduous, unpoetic, self-sacrificing life among the poor, of his gentleness to little children, his fervent piety and striving after the ideal apos-

tolic life, of his personal privations and disappointments, with a growing sentiment of pity and admiration. She set his existence beside her own, and felt overcome with shame and remorse at the contrast. How rich, how varied, how full of colour, poetry, and impressions was her lot, yet how much less she deserved happiness than he ! From morning till night his career was one continued piece of self-renunciation. He grudged himself the smallest indulgence because it had to be spared from that fund devoted from his narrow means to the poor, the sick, and the friendless. His days were spent among unlovely surroundings and the constant associations of poverty and pain. And after all what was his reward ?

Helwyse wanted everyone to be joyous, everyone's life to be like her own, richly dowered, abounding in hope, bright in the

retrospection, brighter still in the looking forward. She could not bear to think of the curate sitting alone in his little room, dwelling painfully on their past intercourse, and, most of all, on what had just taken place ; least of all could she bear to think that her own happiness and lightness of heart in the future should appear as want of consideration towards himself.

Just then, she felt far from happy, much less light-hearted. The curate's disappointment, Kingsbury's altered behaviour, and Freeland's unaccountable agitation, weighed upon her spirits. For the first time in her life she returned to her studio without the slightest feeling of exultation.

CHAPTER XI.

RIVALS.

HELWYSE did not look forward to that visit of Kingsbury's for the purpose of introducing Lady Maud, with very cordial feelings. She felt so far uncordial about it that, when the day came, she made no preparations, bought no flowers for her window, allowed her studio to wear its usual work-a-day look, and put on just the first gown that came to hand. This happened to be an ordinary winter dress of black cashmere, made in

the simplest manner, which, whilst it set off to the best possible advantage her delicately outlined features, abundance of fair hair, and long-lashed, dark grey eyes, had very little look of joy or welcome about it. Now there is nothing more becoming to a beautiful, fair-haired woman than just such a costume as Helwyse wore, namely, a black stuff dress with a large velvet collar turned back on the shoulders, and a white lace collar over it; nothing by way of ornament except an old-fashioned pearl brooch that Helwyse wore so often for her mother's sake, nothing to spoil the shape of her lovely head, or the waving lines of the bright, soft hair. It was the plainest dress that could be, a dress put on in a minute, a dress that did not overturn tables and chairs as she walked along, above all, a dress that did not want a

room to itself, and when put away could be folded like a silk handkerchief.

But, perfect as it was of its kind, it was not the kind of dress to wear as a welcome, and, by the side of her three visitors, all rustling in the newest Parisian toilettes, it looked certainly a little cold. Lady Wendover and her daughters were what are called magnificent women, the kind of women dress-makers adore on account of the enormous quantity of stuff consumed in their skirts, and who benefit workwomen generally by their addiction to crinolines and other feminine inventions. They were indeed always well dressed. On the occasion of their appearance at Helwyse's modest door, so much impressed was Mrs. Bray by the combined silks, velvets, furs, and feathers of the three ladies, and the

amount of time consumed in transporting their trains from the hall to the studio, that she said—"It was enough to waken the dead from their graves. But," she added confidentially to the elderly lodger on the first floor, "between you and me, sir, how feeble womankind can carry about such a weight passes my understanding! Why, the weight of My Lady's bonnet upstairs equalizes that of a real live peacock, I am sure; and as to the fowls of the air, and the beasts that perish, I counted five birds' beaks, between them, and how many skins of four-footed animals, I don't know, what with the muffs and fur jackets, to say nothing of the foot-warmers in the carriage. But, lawk-a-mercy! when, after a time, they had all got into the studio, the gentleman looking as small as nothing behind 'em, it was as good as going to

Court ! What they are worth as they stand in their clothes, makes one's hair stand on end to think of!"

The three ladies having entered the studio, followed by Kingsbury, and the preliminary introduction got through, Helwyse did the honours a little coldly, feeling, for some reason or other, ill at ease. Why was it so? She kept asking herself the question, chiding herself for this unwonted embarrassment, trying to believe that it was fancied. But, in spite of her efforts, she felt that she was laughing and talking artificially, and that others perceived it;—not Lady Wendover and her younger daughter—they were carelessly amusing themselves as they would have done at Christy & Manson's sale-rooms, at a popular author's tea-party, or any other place of entertainment offering a little easy instruction as well.

An artist's studio, especially when the artist happens to be personally interesting, affords matter for conversation, has something fresh about it, and relieves the monotony of fashionable existence. The two ladies, therefore, who were inquisitive as well as good-natured, felt quite as much interest in the cut of Helwyse's collar and sleeves as in her pictures. When, after having turned over a portfolio with her, tea was brought in, they felt bound to monopolize her no longer, but allowed Lady Maud the benefit of the young artist's remarks.

Helwyse moved to the tea-table, and Lady Maud and Kingsbury, who had been looking at the wall paintings of the corridor, moved thither, also ; but Kingsbury had no sooner made himself useful with the tea-cups than he took a chair beside

Lady Wendover, and, turning himself sideways from the other two ladies, engaged her and her younger daughter in an animated conversation.

Thus Helwyse and Lady Maud were left to a *tête-à-tête*, and, perhaps, it was hardly to be wondered at that it began unpromisingly. The two formed a striking contrast. Helwyse, with that wild-rose look of freshness and innocence which she had brought with her from her Irish home, dressed, moreover, after that simple, almost Puritan fashion, and Helwyse as frank and impulsive in her speech now as she had been at twelve, when not conscious of criticism, could have little in common with the faultlessly-attired, faultlessly-phrased, self-possessed woman of the world, who, now sitting opposite to her rival, was secretly trying to read her through and

through. The two, therefore, were deceiving each other whilst they thus talked common-places; Helwyse with an occasional guilty blush, Lady Maud with unfaltering aplomb. To Helwyse it was hateful that it should be so, that she could not talk to this woman as to any other, but with an underlying bitterness and mistrust, and with a thought of Kingsbury. Why should she think of him just then? Why should she feel that Lady Maud was thinking of him too? Why should she feel this foolish, unbearable self-consciousness? There is nothing that makes us appear so keenly inferior to another person, as the presence of mind he uses to our disadvantage. We know, and probably he knows, also, that, but for this quality, we are more than a match for him, we may outshine him even intellectually and our

superiority avails nothing, simply because we lose momentary control over ourselves! It is not strength, it is not genius, it is not ingenuity, or even hardihood, that turns the scale of human affairs at critical moments. Self-collectedness wins in small emergencies as well as great, and when our fortunes have grown desperate, and our forces seem routed, a cool hand and a steady eye may yet save the day. If there was one person in the world whom Helwyse would fain have impressed favourably, it was Lady Maud. They had heard so much of each other that it was only natural both should feel something of the kind. Helwyse had made up her mind to be gracious to her aristocratic visitor, Lady Maud had laid herself out to please, whilst, perhaps, Kingsbury's words were ringing in the ears of both all the time.

"You will be fascinated by Lady Maud," he had said to Helwyse. "She has all the accomplishments of an idle, high-bred woman, with the sincerest love of art and the brightest wit. I feel sure you will become friends."

To Lady Maud he had said—

"Miss Fleming is quite as charming as her pictures—not spoiled by the world, and perhaps not quite worldly enough as yet. You will prove a most valuable friend to her."

Lady Maud, regarding Helwyse, therefore, as a protégée of Kingsbury's to begin with, and not at all knowing the depth and real strength of her character—which, perhaps, Kingsbury was as far from comprehending as anyone—began by being just a little patronizing. It seemed the most natural thing in the world. Here was the daughter of a noble house,

a former playmate and companion of princesses, a guest in royal palaces on the one hand, and on the other, a young girl who was well-known to have brought from her village home in Ireland no fortune but palette and brushes. Lady Maud, moreover, was several years older than Helwyse, and felt twice as old by virtue of superior worldly wisdom and wider experience of every kind ; so when she began to say condescending little common-places, and make flattering little speeches, it was with the certainty of giving pleasure. But Helwyse was in no humour to be flattered or petted at that moment, and Lady Maud tried a different tone. She felt drawn to the sweet-faced, blushing girl, dressed after such bewitchingly Puritan fashion, and was determined to win her somehow. Perhaps

she would have felt very differently had not Helwyse manifested more self-possession ; she might even have gone so far as to dislike her, but, as it was, she was gradually beginning to feel compassionate, sympathetic, protective.

“ You must come and spend a few days with us at Rockham,” she said, with real cordiality. “ Do let us look forward to that pleasure.”

“ You are most kind,” Helwyse answered, and feeling cordial in spite of herself. “ I am afraid, however, that I shall not be able to take a holiday for some time to come.”

“ But Mr. Kingsbury tells me you have been nursing a sick brother for the last few weeks. You need a little rest, I am sure.”

“ And that is another reason for wanting to work uninterruptedly now,”

Helwyse said. "I have not painted for months."

"Mr. Kingsbury has also told us of your devotion to a young orphan nephew. How good of you to undertake such responsibilities! How happy it must make you! I wish I were you!"

That piece of outspokenness, which was, moreover, perfectly genuine, touched Helwyse. She looked up with an expression of frank, inquiring sympathy.

"You must know exactly what I mean," Lady Maud continued, speaking quickly and impatiently. "I cannot help envying just such a life as yours, and thinking how much more useful and satisfactory it is than mine. I am going to a ball to-night. You told us just now that you never went out on Wednesday evenings, because it is the boy's holiday. To-morrow, when I wake up, I have nothing to do but amuse myself.

You will get up early, sit down to your easel, and when the evening comes, will have achieved something. Which day is the better spent, yours or mine?"

Thus Lady Maud talked, and Helwyse gradually forgot all the coldness that had gone before, and with the warmth of heart natural to her, threw herself into the confidences of her new or rather would-be, friend. She was getting interested in Lady Maud, who appeared to her, in spite of her fine clothes, condescension, and even superficial manner, a possibly noble creature, a woman discontented with inanition, and anxious to do something with her time and intelligence.

" You may smile when I talk of my studio," she continued, pouring out these spiritual needs and aspirations as if for the first time in her life, whereas, in reality, it was not so. " You may think that it can

make little difference whether I occupy myself in making poor sketches or reading sensational novels ; but it does make a difference to me. The trying to make good sketches is a more satisfactory condition of mind than the trying to pass away time over bad books—or anyhow, indeed. That time !—how terribly it weighs upon some people of my acquaintance.”

“ Does it, indeed ?” asked Helwyse innocently. “ I have only known those who never find time enough for what they have to do.”

“ Ah ! that shows how different our experiences have been ! But you must come to Rockham, dear Miss Fleming. What delightful mornings we should have together ; and I promise you no one shall interrupt you at work—except myself.”

Helwyse was so taken aback, so overcome by this frankness and cordiality, that

she did indeed make half a promise to visit Lady Maud in the country, and having achieved that point, their dialogue ended, and the visitors talked of going.

Directly Helwyse found herself between Lady Maud and Kingsbury, all her former want of ease returned. Some rare old vases on the wall were discussed. Helwyse knew all about them, and could give a charming account of the way in which they had come into her possession years ago. Lady Maud, with the utmost readiness, told the story, which she had heard from Kingsbury, to her mother and sister, and discussed the vases as if ceramic art had been with her a life study. Helwyse listened meekly. Again they talked of music, and an exquisite little composition was mentioned that had lately been played for the first time by a renowned pianist. “Could anyone play it?” asked Kingsbury.

It happened that Helwyse could play it very well indeed—much better than Lady Maud, who, without hesitation, however, sat down to the piano and performed the piece. She played it indifferently, it must be confessed, but her playing was *à propos*, and to do a thing *à propos* is a meritoriousness sure of commanding admiration. Then, amid many expressions of gratification and friendliness, the three ladies, accompanied by Kingsbury, took their leave.

“What a delightful visit! How charming is Miss Fleming! What a pretty studio! How becoming is her dress!” said the three, all in a breath, and when their first burst of admiration was over, Lady Maud added,

“Yes. Why did you not tell us, Mr. Kingsbury, that Miss Fleming was distractingly ingenuous, as well as being distractingly pretty? She is the most un-

sophisticated person I have ever met!"

An animated discussion followed this speech, which had impressed Kingsbury unpleasantly. Why should he keenly resent the epithets "ingenuous" and "unsophisticated?" Why should he reluctantly admit that, in spite of all his sophisms to the contrary, they were strictly applicable to Helwyse? Above all, why should he wish that Lady Maud had not made the discovery?

He felt disappointment in the visit altogether. Helwyse had done scant justice to herself. Even her dress did not please him; whilst he could not at all understand or forgive her reserve, coldness, shyness—he hardly knew by what name to call this new mood of hers. Anyhow, the affair had been a failure. When indeed did a man like to hear of a woman he admires, and is presumably in love with, called dis-

tractingly ingenuous? Lady Maud, in calling Helwyse the most unsophisticated person she had ever known, acted precisely as her worst enemy might have done, supposing that enemy to be her rival.

CHAPTER XII.

KINGSBURY'S LOVE-LETTER.

A WEEK or two later, Helwyse sat with a love-letter in her hand, which, it is hardly necessary to say, was signed "Edward Kingsbury." Nothing in the world could seem more natural than the arrival of such a letter, and it might appear equally likely that nothing would give Helwyse greater happiness than the perusal of it; yet there she sat with the letter in her hands, reading it again and again, pondering over every word, as if the exquisite handwriting were Coptic or High Dutch, weighing every sentence, as

if it were some mystic Kabbala instead of the clearest, most straightforward English possible. She had read it through, the first time, tremblingly, blushingly, eagerly ; the second, demurely, and with a gradual change of countenance as she drew to the close ; the third, with a proud pale face, and a look of unmistakable pain and irresolution about the sweet mouth.

Why was it so ? Who so unlikely as Edward Kingsbury to write anything to the woman he loved that was not chivalrous, and tender, and devoted ? How had it come about that the consummation of her dearest wishes brought rather disappointment than exultation, uneasiness rather than content ?

The fact is, Helwyse had been led to doubt of Kingsbury's feelings for her during the last few weeks, and when his letter came was just in that frame of mind

when self-deception is impossible. Either he loved her dearly or he did not, and for once and for all, his words would now persuade or disenchant. They disenchanted. She could not help believing that his preference had been a mere wavering fancy all along, and that but for the chivalrousness of his nature, and his utter incapacity to do an ungenerous or unmanly thing, he might never have made her an offer of marriage at all. He had gone so far that he felt it due to her to go farther still, and thus place it in her power to right herself in the eyes of the world.

“ Yet am I just to him ? ” she asked herself, as her heart sank within her at this conviction. “ No, no, it cannot be. He does love me—I have but misread him. Had he only come instead of writing, such a doubt could never have crossed my mind at all. Ah ! why did he not come ? ”

There was the rock on which her faith foundered. Why should he stay away ? The thought was so distressing that she put aside the letter, and, sitting down to her easel, tried to think over it calmly whilst she worked. But she soon discovered that work was impossible. Her hand trembled, her eyes failed her, all the brightness seemed to have forsaken her palette, all the coherence had vanished from her outlines, and a transient ill-humour with herself, and distrust in her own powers, made her efforts appear almost presumptuous. What was the use of trying to draw well ? Perhaps she had herein encouraged self-deception also, and she was but a contemptible artist, after all !

She felt that the unanswered letter lying in her desk was accountable for this mood, and determined to master its contents and

to come to a decision about it at once. She carried it with her to her bedroom where she was sure of being undisturbed. There were pens, ink, and paper on the little table by the window, so she sat down, resolved not to stir till her reply should be written.

Never was a more difficult letter to answer ! The more she considered every sentence, the greater seemed the difficulty. One moment she said to herself—he loves me—another he loves me not. But what could she think in reading such a passage as this?—

“ You must surely have perceived my sincere admiration long ago, and I should have spoken on the subject of my wishes before but for one or two misgivings which I feel bound to put before you. I am quite sure you would wish me to be

perfectly open, so as to prevent any misapprehension in the future, if I am permitted the happiness of devoting my life to your own, and I am equally sure you will forgive me for saying what I only say out of my love for you. Whilst entirely approving of your devotion to your family, and the numerous self-sacrifices undertaken by you on their behalf, it is only natural that I should feel a little anxious on the matter, and that I should ask you to live rather for myself than for others, if you consent to become my wife. I do not, of course, bid you to choose between your relations and myself, I only ask you to reflect whether you could so far yield to my wishes as to make those earlier ties and duties secondary to the closer and more binding ones you impose on yourself by marriage. There are several reasons, some of which will

occur to you, why I should make this request. You will pardon me if I appear too outspoken or too reticent. I am so anxious not to pain you now, and so anxious to avoid the remotest possibility of paining you in the future, that I may err on either side."

"Ah!" Helwyse thought, as she leaned back in her chair, with paper and envelope ready for writing before her, "would he think of all these things if, indeed, he cared for me as I used to fancy?—would it matter to him how much I loved Bryan and the children, so long as I loved him best of all? If we two really loved each other, would there not be all the more love and to spare for his relations as well as mine, and for all the world besides?" She gave a little sigh, and took up her pen to write, but tears dimmed her eyes and, in spite of herself, fell on the paper. That

sheet was put aside and another and another, and at last she found writing impossible, and throwing herself on the bed, sobbed bitterly.

The words she had just read were not to be got rid of, do what she might, and in spite of her efforts to soften them, they made Kingsbury appear ungenerous and unkind. She was hurt, as is often the case, far more by what was implied than what was said. Why did he not tell her in plain words that he was ashamed of her relations, because of their humble position in life ; that he wished her to have as little as possible to do with Bryan, just because Bryan happened to be a city clerk ; that, if Bridget had to work for her living, Bridget must not be received into his house ? He might quite safely have said all this, poor Helwyse thought, he would not have vexed me half so much as by only hinting it.

And then came the most unwelcome thought of all. The misgivings of which Kingsbury wrote could have been listened to, allowed to have their way, but for one reason: he had so long and so openly showed his liking and admiration for her, that he felt bound to make this declaration. It was made out of consideration rather than love. It was, indeed, the only way in which he could repair the harm he had done.

But had he done any harm? Did she care for him more than for anything else in the world? Would she be able to meet him in the future as if nothing had happened? She hardly knew. She only felt sure of one thing, namely, that life seemed dreary just then, and that, as far as regarded making it better, it hardly mattered how she answered that letter. There it was, and nothing Kingsbury could do or say

now could unwrite it, or blot it from her memory. The enchantment was over. The poetry of life seemed gone. She felt old and careworn, and quite another Helwyse from that of yesterday.

But the day was going, and she determined to bestir herself, and not let looking back or despondency get the better of her. Her answer written and despatched, she thought she should be able to go on with her work as usual, and she had already lost so much time! Ambrose, too, would soon be back to dinner, and when it was over, she had promised to go out with him to buy a pair of skates. Freeland was coming in the evening to talk over the boy's outfit. She must collect her thoughts, and write her letter.

At last it was written, and ready for posting. Then, putting on a cheerful look for Ambrose's sake, she listened to his

merry talk as usual, and made pretence to smile. The purchase of the skates occupied another half hour, and what with one thing and another, the short winter afternoon was got through somehow. Fortunately no visitors came, so that she could think quietly as she arranged her studio for the next day's work. She was determined to be mistress of herself, to let no one, not even Bryan, know what had happened, to pursue the even tenor of her existence without any reference to Kingsbury at all. They had been thrown so much together of late that it would not be easy. But it must be done. They should meet constantly, of course, and, in the eyes of the world, on friendly terms as of old.

If anything could have made Kingsbury more in love with Helwyse, it was just such a letter as she had sent. Every word breathed the tenderest, truest, proudest

nature, a nature, moreover, which he least of all had understood; every word painted her in her true colours, sensitive, loyal, high-minded.

The letter made him more undecided than ever. His first impulse was to go to her, to explain away doubts and misapprehensions, for once and for all to make everything clear between them. His second impulse was to join a party of friends on a Nile journey for three months, Lady Wendover and her daughters being of the number. The invitation to do this had come by the same post as Helwyse's refusal, and he put both away, quite unable to choose hastily between two almost equally strong inclinations.

He loved Helwyse—he admired Lady Maud. On the one hand was love, on the other ambition. Should he marry this sweet girl-artist, and accept the conse-

quences of an alliance—certainly, as far as his worldly circumstances went, disadvantageous to him? Should he follow, not the dictates of fancy, but of wisdom, and marry Lady Maud, thus inevitably doing what was best for his social position? He loved splendour, princely ways of living, long lineages, traditional prestige, and had always coveted such things next after artistic excellence. “Painters should live in palaces,” was the axiom of a philosopher often in his mouth; and he lived as much in palaces as he could. The recollection of that humble cottage, in which he had found Helwyse working with her sleeves pinned up, was hateful to him. He shuddered when he thought of Ambrose wearing an apron, and of Bryan sitting behind a desk in the City. Strive as he might, he could no more overcome these sensibilities than a

musician his sensitiveness to false notes. It was certainly most unfortunate that it should be so. Perhaps the best thing for him to do, under the circumstances, was to get relief from painful thoughts by undertaking this Nile trip? On his return, he would decide.

Some such thoughts as these were passing in Kingsbury's mind during the next few days. When Helwyse heard news of him, it was that he had set out for a three months' Egyptian tour.

On the whole, she felt satisfaction at the news. She was far from ready to meet him just yet. She had been dreading a chance encounter every day. Directly she heard of his departure, she began to paint again with spirit, to take her usual walks, even to dine at Mrs. Cornwell's as often as usual, What with lost time, moreover, and Ambrose's outfit—for the boy was to ac-

company Freeland to India in April—she was busier than ever, and in Helwyse's case, as in so many others, work came like an angel with healing on its wings.

CHAPTER XIII.

BRIDGET'S BIRTHDAY PRESENT.

BRIDGET'S first few weeks under Mrs. Bramstone's roof were delightful. When Papillon fetched her for a walk, which he usually did at noon, he found the pair occupied in the following fashion: Mrs. Bramstone, a handsome woman with flowing curls and a tragic manner even in trivial things, would be standing on one side of the table, reciting in a loud voice; Bridget, standing on the other, would be imitating, not only her delivery, but her action, the two voices being sometimes a little deafening, whilst the gesticulation was generally a little ludicrous.

Papillon found these scenes as good as a play, and would always contrive to come half an hour too soon, creeping in quietly, though not so quietly as to be unobserved. Thereupon Mrs. Bramstone would point to a chair with a theatrical wave of the hand, saying, “Be seated, sir,” or, “I pray you take a chair,” as emphatically as if it were part of the lesson.

Bridget smiled at him demurely, then the performance was allowed to go on without interruption, unless of a domestic nature. For Mrs. Bramstone, after the manner of geniuses, would often begin her daily work without having taken the precaution to order her dinner, so that no resource was left to the cook but to disturb her mistress. This she did in a provokingly unobtrusive way, as much as if it did not matter how many times the door opened, so long as it did not creak.

To her various questions concerning the baker, butcher, and greengrocer, Mrs. Bramstone would reply curtly, and with a majestic wave of the hand, imparting unspeakable dignity and solemnity to such phrases as these :—“A leg of mutton —not an ounce of fat,” “Parsnips and greens, but look that they be young.” “Good woman, rolls, I say—I starve without my roll.” All this was so much a matter of course that no one smiled, except Papillon. The cook, who seldom had an opportunity of hearing her mistress in public, made perhaps more errands of a disturbing nature than was necessary, for the sake of hearing that fine voice roll out such words as, do what she might, she could make nothing of herself.

“What can ail you and me?” she once said to the rather sentimental baker, who admired the cook as much as the cook

admired her mistress. “Why, when we call an onion an onion, does it sound so mean, so low? Now onions—that’s one of missus’s grand words! It’s a word that sounds as well in her mouth as cherub in yours or mine.”

Whereupon the baker gallantly observed that there was one word spelt in four letters he could pronounce as well as anybody, and if she liked he would try; the little scene ending in a sly kiss, stolen behind the empty bread basket on the area steps.

The lesson over in the study upstairs, Bridget would put on bonnet and cloak, and set out for a long walk with Papillon. They were as good friends now as ever. He had never once alluded to that last conversation at Bournemouth, since their return, and naturally his reticence made her doubly grateful and doubly

ready to make sacrifices for him. His considerate conduct, combined with one or two other circumstances, had lately set her thinking. She was very happy in her relations with Mrs. Bramstone, and wanted nothing better than to carry out her old plans, but some unforeseen obstacles and difficulties had come in the way.

She had taken Aunt Helwyse into her confidence, also her new friend Mrs. Bramstone, and at last, she decided to speak to Papillon.

It was the day before her eighteenth birthday—that eagerly-looked-for holiday when she was to have Hilary for the day—and Papillon had promised to take them to the pantomime. Helwyse and Ambrose, Patrick and the three little girls, were to meet them at the theatre, and return afterwards to tea in Bryanstone Square. All this was too delightful. “What a treat Mr. Papillon

has provided for my poor boys!" thought poor Bridget, "all the more I am in duty bound to tell him what is in my mind now."

So, as they were walking out together, she began very meekly, yet in that tone of quiet decision which was a part of her frank, childish nature,

"Mr. Papillon, I must tell you what I have made up my mind to do before to-morrow, or I should not be able to enjoy myself a bit. You will think me very changeable, I am sure, and perhaps foolish, when I say that I have altered my mind, and that I have given up the idea of being an actress after all!"

"And you will stay with me instead? That is good news indeed."

"No," she said, shaking her head very sadly, "I am going to Aunt Helwyse. It must be so, Mr. Papillon; I felt that before I spoke to Aunt Helwyse about it

and she agrees with me, and I shall go to her and take Hilary with me—at least for a time—and perhaps go out as a daily governess."

"But why must it be so, my dear child? You are talking riddles," Papillon said, greatly puzzled; "you are so happy with Mrs. Bramstone, you are getting on well with your lessons, why should you throw everything away now, unless it is because you have made up your mind to do as I asked you and marry me?"

"That is just why I cannot, must not stay," Bridget continued, speaking with great deliberation. "If you only fancy yourself in my place for a moment, you will see that it could not be otherwise. You are my kindest friend in the world, you are ready to do anything for me, and the only sacrifice you ask me I refuse to make. How can I accept kindnesses with-

out end from you after that? It would not be right; Aunt Helwyse says so."

"But I love you all the same, my dear," Papillon said; "I am just as anxious to make you happy in your own way as I was before."

"I know it, and Aunt Helwyse knows it too. She says there is nothing left for me to do but to choose between you and Hilary. It is useless for me to think about it. I cannot leave Hilary, so, Mr. Papillon, you must just let me have my own way, and go home."

"And what, then, has become of your ambitions? You were going to make quite a fortune, to put money in the bank every year, to live in a little house with your poor boys, and invite me every Sunday to tea?" he asked playfully, but Bridget could not smile yet.

"You see," she said, looking very dis-

mal. "Such unexpected things have happened. How could I suppose that Ambrose would go out to India? He will be away for two or three years, and when he comes back will be almost grown up, and perhaps not need me at all. And then there is Patrick! He will be earning money in another year, and he told me the last time I saw him that he was going to marry Kathleen when he was twenty-two! Nobody wants me but Hilary."

"And I!" put in Papillon reproachfully.

"Ah! that is the worst of it all. How could I ever suppose that I should care for another person as much as I care for one hair of Hilary's precious head?"

"And do you really care for me as much as that?" Papillon asked, with mixed gravity and amusement. He could not feel angry with Bridget even when uttering such sentiments as these.

"Yes, I am sure I do—sometimes a little more. There is the difficulty," Bridget went on, quite practically and prosaically; yet it was easy to see from the tears on her long eyelashes, and the quiver of her under-lip, that she was greatly agitated. "I should hate and despise myself if I ever cared for you so much that I could for a single little minute dream of forsaking Hilary. I belong to Hilary, and I must go to him. No one ought to hinder me," she added, in a passionate voice.

"Is it indeed so," asked Papillon, very kindly. "Is it only Hilary that stands between us now? Why then, my darling, what so easy as to make all things smooth by taking me and keeping him?"

"Yes, it is only Hilary now, but I could not keep him if I married you, Mr. Papillon. It would not be fair to you. It would be bargaining."

“Nonsense!” Papillon said. “I am sure you would take care of us both,” and again he tried to make her smile.

“No, no! I could not marry you unless I loved you well enough to give up everything, even Hilary, for your sake. The only thing for me to do is to go to Aunt Helwyse. I shall earn enough as a daily governess to send Hilary to school, and that is all I want now.”

And then she looked at him, trying to smile through her tears, and continued—

“Perhaps it was very foolish of me to dream of doing such wonderful things! Aunt Emmie says that girls should be satisfied with sitting at home and mending stockings; but I have mended so many, and boys make such big holes! I did want to do something else. I thought, if I could only earn money as Aunt Helwyse does, so as to make a home for my poor

boys, it would be such a comfort to poor papa and mamma if they could know! And I should have liked a life like Mrs. Bramstone's too. I should have dearly liked to go on the stage!"

"I certainly see no reason why you should not, after all that you have said," even Papillon said, consolingly. "I will speak to your aunt Helwyse. I will try to persuade her that her scruples are unreasonable."

"You will never do that," Bridget rejoined, shaking her head. "Aunt Helwyse says that the training you propose to give me would cost you a great deal of money, and that I have no right to accept it now, because you asked me to marry you, you know."

"Then I wish I had never done it," Papillon answered, looking both penitent and aggrieved.

"I wish you had not, indeed. There began all the mischief," Bridget said, with a half comic, half pathetic look. "If you had allowed things to remain as they were, we might have been as happy as the day is long. But it is of no use to think about it now. I am dearly fond of Aunt Helwyse. I shall often see you. We need not be so very miserable."

"We will consider nothing as finally settled yet. We will enjoy ourselves on your eighteenth birthday, and after that there will be time enough to make up our minds," he answered, and the question, by mutual consent, was put off for a few days.

How happy was Bridget as she awoke next morning with the thought that in another hour or two Hilary would be with her! True to his word, Uncle Bryan deposited him at Bryanstone Square on his way to the City, and the little fellow had

the almost ecstatic felicity of being with his beloved Bridget, and helping in the preparations for a tea-party as well. Some other boys and girls were invited for the pantomime, which was an afternoon performance, and in the evening they were to dance Sir Roger de Coverley and act charades. No wonder that Bridget forgot all her troubles, and found existence quite heavenly in the anticipation of all those delights for her darlings. She was so absorbed and so happy that she quite forgot the fact of Papillon having given her no birthday present.

On arriving at Bryanstone Square she found that flowers, cakes, and sweetmeats had been provided for her guests in abundance, but nothing especially for her. The thought of such an omission would perhaps never have entered her head, if Hilary had not asked quite

naturally, "Well, Bridget, what did Mr. Papillon give you this morning?" She merely laughed, however, and kissed him merrily, saying, "A dozen things. Your company to begin with, then the pantomime for us all, goosy—"

"But nothing to put in your pocket, I mean?" urged Hilary.

"Well, if you can find a pocket big enough to hold all these. Yes," answered Bridget. Hilary, who was, at that moment, engaged in the interesting occupation of arranging crackers, relapsed into silence, thinking that after all that could be said about clever people, there was no one half so clever as his Bridget.

When Papillon returned to lunch, a careful observer might have noticed that he paid very particular attention to Hilary indeed. He was not habitually fond of little boys—few bachelors are—and he

generally left children, whether boys or girls, to seek him if they wanted him. But he took especial pains about pleasing Hilary to-day, presented him with the first thing he admired, for which Bridget administered a severe reproof, drew caricatures for him, filled his pockets with sugar-plums, and, lastly, promised to take him to the waxwork on his own birthday, which happened to be in a fortnight.

“If Bridget will let me go?” Hilary said, looking across the table a little anxiously.
“Of course we must ask her, you know.”

“Of course,” Papillon said, but Bridget would not hear of such a thing. Mr. Papillon was demoralizing them all, she replied. Hilary would soon become a determined pleasure-seeker, a worldling, an idler, and if so, she should despise him. These long words impressed Hilary greatly, and

her arguments appeared as usual unanswerable. Throughout the pantomime, Papillon sat between Bridget and Hilary, and during the evening he was to be seen much more frequently in conversation with them than with anybody else, except, perhaps, Helwyse. Even Bridget could not help wondering what made Papillon and Aunt Helwyse talk together so mysteriously. Was it about herself, and what was Aunt Helwyse saying?

Nothing, however, could be more delightful than the entertainment as a whole, and when at an early hour the visitors went away, leaving Bridget and Papillon alone in the drawing-room, she said, with a sigh of childish enjoyment,

“Oh! Mr. Papillon, was ever a party so perfect as ours? The first we have ever given together, yet how well we did it!”

“I am glad you are satisfied, and I hope

it is not the last we shall give together," he said smiling. "But now, do tell me, Bridget, have you not wondered all day long why I have never given you a birthday present? All your own people have sent you something, even Mrs. Plumsted and Desiré have presented their little offerings. You must have thought it strange that I should be the only friend to greet you empty-handed, your eighteenth birthday too?"

"No, indeed. Is not all the happiness I have enjoyed to-day your gift? You have given me too much already, much too much," she added, with emphasis.

"But to-day's happiness is past and gone, and I want to give you something that will make you happy as long as you live. I have prepared a little surprise for you, which I know will give you great pleasure. Wait here whilst I see if all is ready."

And leaving her wondering what these mysterious words could mean, he went away, returning in ten minutes with a beaming face.

“Come,” he said, taking her by the hand, “you shall have just one glimpse at your present to-night, and then I must take you to Mrs. Bramstone’s, for it is getting late.”

He led her into the hall, and upstairs, placing his finger on his lip to impose silence. What could it all mean, thought Bridget? but her suspense did not last long. On the threshold of that little room she had herself occupied, when she had fled to Papillon’s home as to a harbour of refuge three monhs ago, he paused, and opening the door gently with one hand, with the other still holding hers, advanced towards the little bed. The gas was turned low, so low that Bridget gazed and gazed again for a moment, hardly daring

to believe the evidence of her senses. In there, sleeping sweetly, his rosy face buried in the pillow, his curly head making a light in the place, his hands fastened on the last thing she had given him, lay Hilary, her own Hilary, her treasure beyond all price, her adoring and adored !

She stood contemplating the picture transfixed with joy, and then turned towards Papillon ; he drew her on to the landing-place, for fear of waking the child, and closing the door as gently as he had opened it, said, in a fond, joyous voice,

“ When I give Hilary to myself, Bridget, do I not give him in a sense to you ? He shall be mine as much as yours for the future, and you shall never more be parted, my dear, either from him or from me.”

She was in his arms now, kissing his eyes, his beard, his hands, his garments, weeping foolishly out of the very fulness

of her gratitude and love, ready to fall at his feet and worship him, ready to lay down her life for him, if need be.

"Oh ! you are an angel to me, and I love you as well as Hilary. I began to think so long ago ; but I am quite sure of it now," she said, and Papillon did not grow tired of the words, though she repeated them a dozen times.

CHAPTER XIV.

BRIDGET MARRIED.

“BRIDGET,” Papillon said, when he fetched her next morning for their usual walk, “I have been thinking that we might as well be married at once, and without any ado. If your Uncle Bryan consents, will you walk off with me one morning to the little church to which I used to take you on Sundays, and go through the ceremony?”

“Would it not be wiser to wait till after Easter?” said the practical-minded Bridget. “You forget that you have paid for all my lessons till then, and it would be a sad loss of money; and be-

sides, I should like to get on with my sums a little before being married."

"The lessons could be given after; I am quite as anxious about your sums as yourself," Papillon answered, smiling. "But I do think, under the circumstances, we have no reason for waiting. And I have been thinking of a plan that will please you, I know. A wedding trip at this time of the year is not to be thought of; but as soon as the spring is sufficiently advanced, what do you say to visiting Dauphiné?"

"Oh!" cried Bridget enraptured. "How delicious to see my beloved France—and what a treat for Hilary!"

"I think you might let me have you to myself for those few weeks," Papillon said, looking injured. "Hilary is too young to enjoy foreign travel thoroughly as yet, and would be quite happy at home; we could send him to Bournemouth with Mrs. Plumsted?"

That thought seemed consoling. Certainly a quiet time at the sea was what Hilary wanted in the spring far more than that long railway journey Bridget remembered so well.

"Yes, you are right," she answered. "It would be foolish to take him, and I ought not to have thought about it; but the spring will soon be here, I must make haste and get his clothes in order if I am really to go away so soon."

"Suppose we think of your own clothes first," Papillon said. "Shall we go this very morning to Bond Street and make our purchases?"

"Not for worlds." This was said with a sententious little shake of the head. "Not for worlds. No. I shall go to see Aunt Emmie, and she will tell me what to buy, and where to do my shopping; I really want next to nothing. I have got

a Sunday dress, a dress to put on when I walk out with you, and a dress to run about and play in with Hilary. Who wants more in winter-time, I should like to know?"

These difficulties were soon got over by Helwyse's intervention, who insisted on providing Bridget with a modest little trousseau, Papillon's additions being so far considered superfluous that they were all locked away.

"Why do you not wear, at least, the little watch I gave you," he asked, not without a little vexation. "It would please me to see you take some pleasure in my gifts."

"There are more ways than one of taking pleasure in things," said the ever ready, unanswerable Bridget. "I often go to my drawers and look at my trinkets and my finery, and I shall wear them all

by degrees. When I first came to you, you know, I could not eat your good dinners, or I should have died of indigestion. It is the same with my fine clothes and jewelry ; I should be overwhelmed if I were to put them all on at once, and look ridiculous into the bargain. There is one thing you gave me when I was quite a little girl, and that is the gift I love best of all."

Saying this she took out of her pocket the little well-worn *Paroissienne* that had been her mother's, on the fly-leaf of which he had written his name under her own in the first days of their acquaintance.

" You wrote this when we were sitting on the heath, do you remember ? " she said, kissing the precious relic a dozen times before replacing it in her pocket, " and because you wrote it, I came to you when I was in trouble."

"And you said then that you had come to stay altogether," he added playfully. "Ah! I little thought when I looked down with so much alarm at your bag and waterproof cloak, that the greatest kindness I had ever done myself was what I did, meaning to be kind to you."

The wedding took place, as Papillon had proposed, on a bright February morning two or three weeks later. Only Bryan and Helwyse were present, and as the weather was particularly mild and fine, Papillon and Bridget started at once on their projected trip into Dauphiné. There were not wanting comical little episodes in their honeymoon any more than in their courtship, and perhaps the secret of her empire over him lay chiefly in her unvarying, incalculable freshness and vivacity. He woke up every day now

feeling quite sure that every incident would wear a wholly different and unspeakably bright aspect, because he should see it through her eyes. A new element, the blessed, rejuvenating element of unexpectedness, was introduced into his daily existence. Bridget's joyous, untired, transparent nature unveiled to him a world hitherto visionary and mysterious; she was unconsciously surprising, captivating him a dozen times a day, simply because she was so young, so happy, so innocent! He felt now that his life was one long blissful series of surprises, and the greatest good that this love could bring him was the sacrifice called forth by these surprises. There is no true happiness without renunciation, and Bridget's very youthfulness, gaiety, and inexperience exacted what was best and most devoted in Papillon's nature. He found

himself doing a hundred things for love's sweet sake that in his easy-going, self-indulgent bachelor days would have appeared troublesome, even insupportable. Papillon, from the day when he quietly took Bridget to the nearest church to be married, dropped utterly and for ever out of the world of fashion and pleasure he had lived in so long and, of late, found so wearying. And he disappeared almost as entirely from the circles even of his friends and acquaintances, who complained that they could hardly ever get as much as a glimpse of him now. All this was to be expected. Papillon was not quite a worldling when he married the bright young girl who, without in the least trying to change him—to her mind he was simply perfection—"only a little tiresome at times, like the poor boys," as she would say, "and sadly destructive and

wasteful about his clothes"—was changing him radically and in every respect for the better.

As for Bridget, she took her mended fortunes with a calm gravity only natural in one so tried, and, in some respects, so old for her years. She had always been as happy as circumstances allowed, and the only trouble in her new life was that she could not share it with all those nearest to her. That taking care of Papillon, she had talked of, implied on her part renunciation also. She felt that henceforth Patrick and Ambrose would never again be under her wing, and her protective young heart yearned to them in the first days of their final separation, with a yearning that made even her joy a serious thing. She had been alike mother and father to her young brothers from their earliest years ; they had hitherto looked to her for counsel

and comfort, for scolding and petting, for encouragement and reward; but now Papillon had usurped their place, and even Hilary must be loved with a divided love.

"One cannot have everything in this world," reasoned the philosophic-minded Bridget. "If you change a shilling for two sixpences you lose your shilling ; but you get your shilling's worth in a different way, and if I had not married you, Hubert, dear, perhaps Mr. Starffe would have asked me, and my poor boys would have lost me all the same, for I must have said yes, you know, to oblige him."

And as it never rains but it pours, the happy surprise of Bridget's marriage was followed by one or two other pleasant little surprises, also. The first of these was a packet of proof sheets, which Bryan found on his breakfast table one morning. Hel-

wyse, as it will be remembered, had come upon a little volume of Irish country stories in manuscript during his illness, and without saying a word to Bryan, had carried them off to Papillon. Under the circumstances, Bryan—being Bridget's uncle—was an interesting person in Papillon's eyes, so interesting that he even read half-a-dozen pages of his manuscript before consigning the packet to a friendly publisher. The stories, which were accompanied by a strong recommendation from Papillon, and possessed the uncommon merit of raciness and real imagination, were speedily accepted, and with the proofs, Bryan received what appeared to him much too liberal a guerdon in the form of a cheque for his productions. Emilia's delight knew no bounds, Bryan was at last to appear before the world as an author, to emerge from his obscurity and take his

place among Helwyse and her literary and artistic friends !

" I felt sure it would be so all along," she said. " Who knows but that you may yet be rich and famous some day, and that we may find ourselves living in Kensington after all ? If you can earn as much money by writing as by your clerkship, you will give that up, of course, and how much nicer to live near Helwyse, and see something of the fashionable world ! "

Bryan built fewer castles in the air ; but certainly felt much happier after the receipt of his proofs. He yearned neither for fame nor for fortune—only for recognition, only to be listened to—and with the first sign of recognition came back all his old interest and delight in literature. He resumed the habit of reading aloud to Emilia in the evening, and when he came to the poets, she always insisted on hearing his

last song or ballad. “ You are too humble about yourself, Bryan,” she would say. “ Why do you not believe me when I tell you that last piece is ~~as~~ good as anything Byron ever wrote ? ” Bryan by degrees obtained quite a local reputation. His songs were set to music, and exhibited in the Islington shop-windows. A biographical notice of him appeared in the local papers. Young ladies wrote for his autograph, and stationers in the neighbourhood begged permission to sell his album portrait. In fine, he was considered in those parts, as Patrick was accustomed to say, “ quite the leading poet of the day.”

These follies did Bryan no harm and greatly delighted Emilia and the children, as well as Mr. Starffe and Miss Wren. The curate was almost as pleased at Bryan’s improved fortunes as his own, two or three things, as he said, “ having

happened to his advantage of late."

The first of these was the increase of stipend before alluded to, and the second, his approaching marriage. He had found the inevitable widow, or rather, the inevitable widow had found him, and as it is permitted, under certain circumstances, for the lady to take the initiative, and Mr. Starffe's shyness was an undoubted obstacle to a happy solution of affairs, he had no need, on this occasion, to make a circumlocution about his grandmother's necklace. The lady, whom he greatly admired, and who was really very good-natured and attached to his sex, if not in particular to him, obviated all difficulties by making the proposal herself, to which the delighted Starffe had only one reply to make. He was but too happy! Like Bridget, he would have said yes, under any circumstances, just to be obliging.

"But, I assure you, I have done the best for myself," he said to Emilia, "and my rector is of the same opinion. 'Starffe,' he said, in quite a paternal manner, 'you have put yourself out of harm's way for the rest of your life.' Could he say more, now, could anyone say more than that?"

Mr. Starffe had certainly not found the ideal of his youth, but to be kept out of harm's way was an unanswerable consolation, and to have satisfied his rector, another.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BIDDING.

A PRIL had come, and with it the day fixed for Ambrose's departure for India. All the final preparations being made, Helwyse took him to Hornsey, and there left him, in order that he might spend his last evening with Bryan, Emilia, and the children. The occasion was not one of lamentation or long faces ; the boy was intoxicated with delight at the thought of the sea-voyage and the enchanted life he was to lead with Freeland, whilst Patrick was too satisfied with his own advance in life to envy him, and

Bryan could but feel that, humanly speaking, Ambrose's fortune was made. The pain of parting would come later, when they should separate at the railway-station, but it was, in reality, Bridget who felt it—though yet on her honeymoon—Bridget, and, perhaps, Helwyse.

When Helwyse returned home on the eve of sailing, without Ambrose, she felt sadly bereft and lonely. She loved the boy, and though he had tried her in many ways, she could not lose him without a pang. He had loved her, too, after his careless, boyish fashion, and sitting alone now, she recalled a dozen loving speeches, a dozen rough kindnesses, which she had not valued before. She longed now that she could hear that merry, imperious young voice calling from the bottom of the stairs—"Aunt Helwyse, tea is ready, and I am starving. Come this minute, please," or,

“Aunt Helwyse, Mr. Freeland has come, and we are going to begin our history. Make haste, there’s a darling!”

Yes, that life with Ambrose and Freeland had been good, and happy, and pleasant to remember! She wished—oh! how she wished!—that it was not past and gone for ever! But Ambrose would not return the Ambrose who went away. Freeland would be surely changed also, when he should come home. Nothing could bring back the old days. From thinking of Ambrose, she began to think of Freeland. She had seen him very often of late, but he had never once alluded to his strange behaviour when they had met in Bryan’s cottage. He had been a little cold in his manner of late, a little hesitating in his speech, a little melancholy now and then—that was all. Freeland already seemed changing from his once joyous, out-spoken,

cordial self, and she never encountered him without a feeling of dread.

Just now, when she heard his voice in the hall, her heart beat quickly. It was the most natural thing in the world that he should come to bid her farewell, but why was it not done before Ambrose went away? And why was it that she felt this wish, why could she not greet him frankly and joyously as of old?

If she was ill at ease, he was no less so, and after interchanging a few ordinary phrases, both lapsed into silence. Freeland refused to be seated, though looking not in the least disposed to go, and also refused her invitation to go downstairs to supper, which occurred to her as a happy thought. All this was awkward, as well as irritating, and seeing him stand by the mantelpiece, glancing alternately at her and the carpet, evidently preparing himself for a long speech, she felt unable to bear it any

longer, and said—merely by way of saying something—

“Mr. Freeland, I have often intended to put a question to you which I am sure you can answer. Do tell me who it was who beautified my studio when I was in Italy nearly three years ago?”

He coloured, smiled a little sadly and proudly, and answered, that ready blush having already in part betrayed his secret,

“I ought to have told you before; but I feared you might be displeased; I did it all.”

“Ah! I knew that you must have had a hand in the decoration,” she said. “But who was the instigator?”

Again he coloured, this time with an expression of pain and mortification, and looking straight into her face, said, with great tenderness and dignity,

"No one was in the secret except myself, and that is why I hesitated to tell you. I wanted to please you, and so long as you were pleased, what mattered it by whom?"

"But," she said, incredulously, "the Persian carpets, the antique vases, the exquisite amber, the Venetian beads? You could not have given me all these?"

"Why not, as well as anyone else? Perhaps you are wondering how I could find the money to buy such things? A man can generally find money to do a thing he sets his heart on, and I could find no better use for mine. That is why I did it."

She looked at him timidly, and it was her turn to blush rosy-red and falter now. It was impossible for her any longer to doubt what was coming. Whatever he had to say, she was bound to hear, and her passiveness gave him courage.

He had been standing by the mantelpiece, hat in hand, all this time ; but he moved nearer to her, and taking a chair opposite her own, sat down as deliberately as if he had come to talk about Ambrose or picture frames. To-morrow, he was saying to himself, every hour would be separating them more and more. He had served Helwyse faithfully and well ; the least she could do was to give him patient hearing now. He only wanted to tell her the truth, and it could be told without circumlocution or fine phraseology.

“ I do not blame you for never having guessed that I loved you,” he began, without shyness or hesitation. “ It was in the nature of things that it should be so. You were kind enough to call me your friend, and treat me like one ; but we were not equals in the eyes of the world for all that. I cannot tell you when I be-

gan to wish for your sake that I had been born in a different sphere ; but I think it was not till after the return from Italy you speak of. You can, therefore, accept what I did towards beautifying your rooms without reluctance, because it was done rather out of friendship than love. I wanted to devote my life towards making you happy, and though the decoration of the studio was a trifle, it was something."

" Oh !" Helwyse cried, " you should not have done it. You have been much too good to me all along ! "

" I own I thought you a little ungrateful sometimes," he said, in a playful voice, looking at her with unspeakable fondness and yearning. " I felt affronted because you never suspected that I could be the author of those Cupids on your wall ! Yet had I not as much right to love you as any other ? "

What could she say? She sat opposite to him, hardly daring to raise her eyes, an involuntary blush from time to time overspreading her cheek, her head bowed humbly, her hands trembling on her knees.

Outside the spring made suburban London a twilight glory. A last ray of sunshine lay on the pink chestnut trees of a neighbouring garden, the lilacs and laburnums shed delicious fragrance, birds twittered among the trees, and beyond, the fresh green foliage of Holland Park showed against a pure sky. All seemed peace and hope, and yet Helwyse, as well as Freeland, had never before felt the world so lonely.

“When I once cared for you more than for anything else in the world,” Freeland went on, “I said to myself, ‘Why should I draw back?’ Was there not just a possibility that one woman might set some

things immeasurably above the good report of the world, and that her name might be Helwyse? Had you cared for me, I felt sure that you were noble enough to make such a sacrifice ; and I did at one time hope that. It was when we were alone at Beechholme Park—do you remember ?”

How could Helwyse ever forget it ? Yet he knew, without any explanation of hers, how differently she remembered all that had taken place during those bright autumn days ! She could not answer ; her head was bowed low over her hands ; it seemed all too sad to be true.

“ We were much together, and you were very good to me. It is hardly to be wondered at that I was led on to hope foolishly against hope. There seemed nothing to divide us then,” he added.

“ I was wrong,” Helwyse said passion-

ately, and rising from the low chair she had occupied opposite to his own, she now walked across the room, and stood in front of her easel, handling her brushes desperately—"I was wrong," she repeated, speaking with her face turned away from him. "I had no right to behave towards you as I did. I shall never forgive myself as long as I live. You ought to despise me."

"No. I do not see that you were very much to blame," Freeland said, also rising, and planting himself by her side, between the window and the easel. "You could not tell what was passing in my mind, and I am sure you were only kind from the kindest motives."

"I did not intend to do any harm," Helwyse said, painting away wildly, and speaking with great agitation. "I knew that, situated as you were, your life must be

very lonely. I only wanted to brighten it a little. And you were always like any other friend in my eyes. You ought to have stayed away."

"Yes, there was the mischief. I ought to have stayed away," Freeland answered, looking crestfallen and self-reproachful. "I excused myself by saying that I could hide my feelings, and that I could be of some small service to you——"

"That makes it much worse—for me, I mean," she said, looking down, and on the point of crying. "You have done more for me than any of my friends, and I have rewarded you only by causing pain. How can I ever be happy again? I shall have this burden on my conscience as long as I live."

"You must forget all about it," Freeland said, and then, feeling that on the verge of this long separation he might be

perfectly frank with her, he added, in a searchingly tender tone, a tone that had almost something of paternal fondness in it—" You are very happy, are you not?"

" I have been very happy," Helwyse answered, speaking with almost as much downrightness and affectionateness as himself. She was only beginning to realize how much she had been to him, and, in losing Freeland, what she was about to lose for ever. " But you cannot suppose that I have no heart, no memory, no gratitude? Oh! you ought to have spoken to me long ago, or to have dropped out of my life altogether."

Then she moved away from the easel and from him, and sitting down by the table, wiped away the tears she could not stay, do what she might.

" Every word you say is true," he replied, then he paused, and after a moment

or two added—"But there is one thing you forget, and that alone explains my conduct. I supposed, at last, that you were indifferent to me. I believed—everybody said—that you cared for Mr. Kingsbury!"

Both were silent for a little. He did not dare to put the question—was it true? She was too proud to say—it was false. She had turned from red to pale, and now sat looking at him calmly, determined not to give way any more.

"It was that conviction," he went on, "that kept me from speaking, that prevented] me from going away before. It was, indeed, that conviction that made me decide to go to India. I foresaw a time when you would need me no longer, when I must not presume to offer you the slightest service any more, and I felt that my old life without you would be im-

possible. Had I not believed this, what should have prevented me from saying, ‘*Helwyse, come with me?*’ And I am still bound to believe it, so that I dare not say now—‘*Helwyse, follow me.*’ ”

Then he paused, and looked at her for the answer that did not come.

What, indeed, could she say? Love and pride, gratitude and remorse, were waging war in her heart. She longed to pour out, in her turn, a confession to him, but the words would not come. Yet the minutes were gliding by; in a few more, he would be gone! For his part he felt that nothing more remained to say. He had told her the truth, and nothing but the truth, as he had intended to do. Better for both now that the parting should be got over.

“Do not be grieved about me,” he said, rising and holding out his hand with a

smile, “and remember Ambrose and me sometimes——”

“I will write——” she faltered.

“And we will write also.” Then he said, in a different voice, “If at any time you want a friend, you have one in Arthur Freeland. I shall always love you, Helwyse, better than anything else in the world.”

They shook hands with a quiet—“Good-bye, God bless you,” then she accompanied him to the stair-head, whispering a second word of farewell. There was no one in the hall to open the front door, so Helwyse went downstairs also, and on the threshold they lingered, both wanting to say a last something, both lacking courage. She had her hand on the lock, and looked down, blushing and trembling, but he interpreted her agitation amiss, and so the final adieu was said, and he hurried away—lonelier than he had come?—he hardly knew.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BLUE PETER IS HOISTED.

HELWYSE closed the door gently, and shutting herself up in her studio, shed abundant tears, half of sorrow and half of joy. With a sense of great desolation was mingled a feeling of pride and happiness. This love of Freeland's made her feel newly, abundantly rich, suddenly dowered beyond all her hopes. An hour or two before she had said to herself, that life was strangely sad and lonely—that in spite of her artistic success, and the favour and flatteries of the world, no maiden in London was so forlorn as she!

She had rejected Kingsbury's love as not worth the having. She was on the point of losing the most devoted of her friends. Ambrose was also going to leave her. Bridget needed her no longer, and Bryan's mended fortunes made her less necessary to him than of old. Even her admirer of so many years' standing, Mr. Starffe, had consoled himself !

Yes, Helwyse thought, as she gazed on those frolicsome little Loves, Freeland's creations, that seemed to mock her in her loneliness—it is a dreary world, a disappointing world, and the best thing in it is the love I have thrown away ! She reviewed that long acquaintance with Freeland, reproaching herself, doing more justice to him at every step. What numberless services he had rendered her for which she had barely thanked him ! How devotedly he had nursed Ambrose

when ill of infectious fever? How generously he offered help when Bryan was in trouble. What kindness a friend could render, Freeland had always been at hand to do, unrewarded, often all but unthanked. A great repentance was stealing over her heart, a great revulsion in Freeland's favour asserting itself. What could she do to show her gratitude? How could she let him see that she was not what he took her to be?

She made up her mind at last to write him a letter. He was not to leave till the next morning early, so that nothing was easier than to send a note to him before he went. Yet she hesitated. If the letter did not reach him to-night, it could not be sent in time next day, and would not such a missive despatched that evening surely bring him back to her again! No, she would wait till he had started, and write afterwards.

But she had worked herself up to that pitch of feeling when it was impossible to remain inactive. She must do something to restore herself to his good opinion at once, and to undeceive him about Kingsbury. That was only fair to them all. Freeland ought not to leave England, believing of her what was not true, and she was bound, on Kingsbury's behalf also, to put him right.

Should she follow her travellers to Southampton, and have an interview with Freeland on board? The *Fortunatus*, lying off Southampton docks, was to start at sunset on the morrow; but Freeland and Ambrose, with the rest of her passengers, were begged to go on board early, and accordingly would leave London by the first train in the morning. Why should she not go with them as far as Southampton? It would be affording a great pleasure to Ambrose,

above all, if she took Patrick with her. The lad had much wished to see his brother off, but the expense was not to be thought of, Bryan said, and so he was to take leave of him at the railway-station. Yes, that is the best thing to do, Helwyse now said to herself, I will send a telegram to Patrick. We will stay till the last minute on board, and sleep at Southampton !

But again she hesitated, and, when she sat down to write the telegram, found, to her dismay, that it was too late. The offices would all be shut, and, unless she went herself to Hornsey, she could not let Patrick know of her intention. Again, supposing she carried out this plan, would not Freeland be too busy with his luggage and his charges—for he had two subordinates besides Ambrose to look after—to have any quiet talk with her ?

Yet how could she let him go without a word or a sign? Now, if ever, was the moment to reward him for his long devotion, his much-tried, unswerving love. Now, if ever, was the moment to show him that she was worthy of it. His words were ringing in her ear—"I dare not say now—Helwyse, follow me." The tone of his voice, the trembling of his lip, the searching fondness in his eyes as he looked at her and said this, haunted her, and could not be got rid of or distanced. He had not breathed a word about the loneliness and self-renunciation of those past years, which she was now realizing for the first time, nor of the still intenser loneliness to come; but she foresaw it, and her heart yearned to him with inexpressible tenderness, pity, and admiration. How good, how noble, how high-minded he was! There was no one else like him in

all the world, and now she had lost him for ever !

She wept afresh, and, when she could weep no longer, again set herself to work to frame a decision. He loved her. She loved him. Was she not bound to tell him so ? What else could make him happy ?

The tears had unburdened her heart, and, lighting a lamp—for night had stolen on—she gazed at Freeland's wall-paintings long and earnestly, and as if for the first time. How fresh and lovely they were ! What care and love were bespoken in every line ! And then she took out one by one all the treasures he had given her without a word—the Oriental embroideries, the exquisite shells, the amber and pearl beads, the scented rosaries. How foolishly fond he had been in spending so much money about her ! Surely the hard-earned savings of years were

here! And he had given them without expecting or receiving a word of acknowledgment. She quite well remembered now—and she smiled bitterly as she recalled the incident—her first feeling of disappointment at finding that Kingsbury was not the donor. She remembered, too, how abruptly Freeland had taken leave on Kingsbury's arrival, doubtless imagining what was in her mind. And then her memory flew back to those happy days with the children at Beechholme Park. Who was so kind, so charming, so helpful as Freeland then?—who so self-forgetful? Yet, out of consideration for her, not a word was breathed of his preference—for her sake he had even been cruel to himself. Oh, was anyone so worthy of a true affection as he!

She slept little that night, and in the

first moments of the pearly dawn, when her tame sparrows were twittering among the pear-trees, awaiting the daily crumbs on their mistress' window-sill, and, as yet, not a cloud of vaporous gold betokened the rising sun; when the tall, stately irises and the coquettish daffodils stood out clear and cold against a background of unbroken green, and even the rosy apple blossoms looked as if cut out of ivory. Helwyse, wrapped in a white morning gown, was moving about her studio. She sat down to her writing-table and began to write, this time not to Freeland, but to Bryan, and the letter once begun, was continued unhesitatingly to the end. This done, she began putting her studio in order, as if for a long journey, locking away papers, trinkets, and portfolios, even removing the half-finished picture that lay on the easel.

A dozen letters of invitation and cards were lying unanswered about the table, which she enclosed in a second envelope addressed to Bryan, merely writing outside, "To be answered for me." All these and a few other preparations being made, she gave a last lingering look round her beloved sanctuary, breathed a little sigh and a little prayer, and, hastily turning the key in the lock, carried it with her upstairs.

In the bedroom there was as much more to be done, and by the time wardrobes were put in order, a travelling-trunk packed with clothes, sketch-books and other necessaries for a long journey, it was already nine o'clock.

She rang for her tea then, and when the little maid-of-all-work brought it up, said as calmly as she could,

"Will you please have a cab at the door for me in half an hour, and tell Mrs. Bray

I am going on a journey? Here is the key of my studio, and a letter for her which you will deliver as soon as she comes in." Fortunately for Helwyse, Mrs. Bray was always out marketing at that time of the day. "And here are two letters to be posted immediately," she added with a little faltering of the voice, for all at once it came home to her that she was going away—who could tell for how long? —and without bidding a single friend good-bye.

But it was too late to think of it now, and she felt at that moment as if she had no love except for Freeland, no duty except to him. She had written the tenderest letter to Bryan, and she knew that he would understand everything and forgive. She must write to Mrs. Cornwell and everyone else by turns. How could she think of anything but Freeland now?

When half an hour later Helwyse presented herself at the office of the Peninsular and Oriental Company, demanding a berth in the *Fortunatus*, the clerk looked at her with some astonishment.

"Well, miss," he said. "It just happens there is one place still left in a ladies' cabin, but," and here he took out his watch, "you must look sharp or you will miss your train! The eleven-thirty will take you just in time to catch the pilot-boat—only the eleven-thirty is your last chance, you know."

"I *must* go," Helwyse said, taking out her purse with trembling fingers. "Be quick, I entreat you," and the clerk, who was a person of importance in the place, and a great admirer of art and beauty, no sooner saw the signature on her cheque than he cried, enraptured—

"Miss Helwyse Fleming—the artist!"

Oh ! never fear, miss, I will just jump on the cab myself to see that you don't lose your train or your boxes. I read the papers, you know, and I quite agree with what they say about your pictures. It will honour me to serve you."

Helwyse was too anxious even to smile or to thank her champion, who, having handed over her draft to a fellow-clerk, seized his hat, and helping her into the cab, jumped on the box, wishing such an adventure would happen every week. Romance may sit behind a counter as anywhere else ; and the clerk never forgot that sweet face and pathetic voice to his dying day. But for him, she would most likely have lost her train, her luggage, her money, for she was trembling from head to foot when she alighted, and could not for the life of her remember whither she wanted to

go. Her protector, seeing this agitation, took her ticket, had her trunk labelled, found her a comfortable seat, accepted her faltering thanks with a tremendous flourish of his hat, then the whistle sounded and the train glided gently out of the station.

In the delicious spring afternoon there was no pleasanter sight than the broad blue expanse of Southampton Water, where, amid numberless noble ships, lay the *Fortunatus*, its Blue Peter hoisted, one among many. The lady passengers were, for the most part, busy downstairs arranging their cabins, but the men were on deck, Freeland and Ambrose among them. The pilot-boat had at last put off from shore, and Freeland's attention was fixed on a splendid steamer sailing leeward in the opposite direction, when on a sudden

Ambrose ran up to him, telescope in hand, scarlet with excitement.

"Mr. Freeland! There is a lady in the pilot-boat so like Aunt Helwyse—it must be she! Oh! what has happened?"

"Nonsense, you are dreaming, my lad," Freeland said, turning scarlet all the same.

"Hand me your glass."

"It *is* Aunt Helwyse, Mr. Freeland," Ambrose said desperately, still clutching the glass, "I am quite, quite positive now. She has got on a hat I know well, and a little purple and gold Indian shawl about her shoulders—no one has another like it. Oh! what shall I do if she has come to take me back?" and he looked on the point of crying, but an instant later, still monopolizing the glass, added exultingly—"Hurrah! it is all right. Aunt Helwyse has got her trunk in the boat with her, so she has not come

to take me away. She must have come then to paint the porpoises. Hurrah, hurrah!"

Freeland made no answer. He also recognised her now, and a sudden, incomparable joy took possession of him. For whose sake could she have come, if not, indeed, for his?

The pilot boat was soon alongside the vessel, and Freeland saw that Helwyse glanced upward as if seeking him. A moment more and he was at the gangway to receive her, Ambrose following behind.

"Oh! Aunt Helwyse, you are going with us all the way, are you not?" he cried. "When I first saw you, I thought something was the matter at home, and that you had come to fetch me. But you have got your boxes, so I am sure nothing has happened!"

"Nothing—I am going with you—that

is all," she said, releasing herself from his rough embrace; adding, "Look after my things, will you, whilst I talk to Mr. Freeland a minute or two."

The boy obeyed delightedly, and pounced upon her cloak and bags with an air of great importance. Helwyse, still holding the hand Freeland had held out to her when ascending the hatchway, moved with him to the side of the vessel, where they could talk, unnoticed and alone.

"It was not as you thought," she began, blushing and weeping. "I had a great mind to write—but I did not know what to say—so I came instead!"

The last preparations were now made for sailing. The captain's wife and little daughter had gone back in the pilot boat, the parting bell was rung, and the stately

ship moved majestically from its anchorage.

Helwyse and Freeland had been talking for, at least, half-an-hour, when Ambrose ran up to them, shouting,

“Aunt Helwyse, I have arranged your things beautifully in your cabin, and I have been helping the other lady, too. I am so useful to everybody, you don’t know—but now, do tell me, why you made up your mind so suddenly to go with us! Did Mr. Freeland persuade you to paint the porpoises?”

The dinner-gong fortunately diverted the boy’s attention, and finding that neither Freeland nor Helwyse was in the least hungry, much less entertaining, he followed their advice, and went downstairs to dine without them.

Evening stole on gradually, and was more lovely than the spring day had been. The moon came up, and, as they glided

along, seemed to scatter silver coins on the purple waves ; a star or two shone in the pure heavens. Sea and sky alike were exquisitely bright and peaceful, as the hopes of those two hearts. They were just beginning to talk calmly of the future, and to explain matters satisfactorily, when again that terrible Ambrose burst upon them.

“ Mr. Freeland—Aunt Helwyse ! What can you be dreaming of ? It is so lively below, and you must be so dull up here all by yourselves ! Do come downstairs, and I will eat a little more to keep you company.”

The Blue Peter of the *Fortunatus* being hoisted, there is nothing left for us to do but imagine her safely landed in a happy haven, and all kinds of gladnesses and good hopes awaiting those who were left

behind. The dreaded sum of—"Four and three make seven," had turned out luckily for all concerned in it at last. Might not the friendless little orphans standing on a strange threshold, demanding love and shelter, figure as Heaven-sent angels, whom their protectors had entertained unawares?

THE END.

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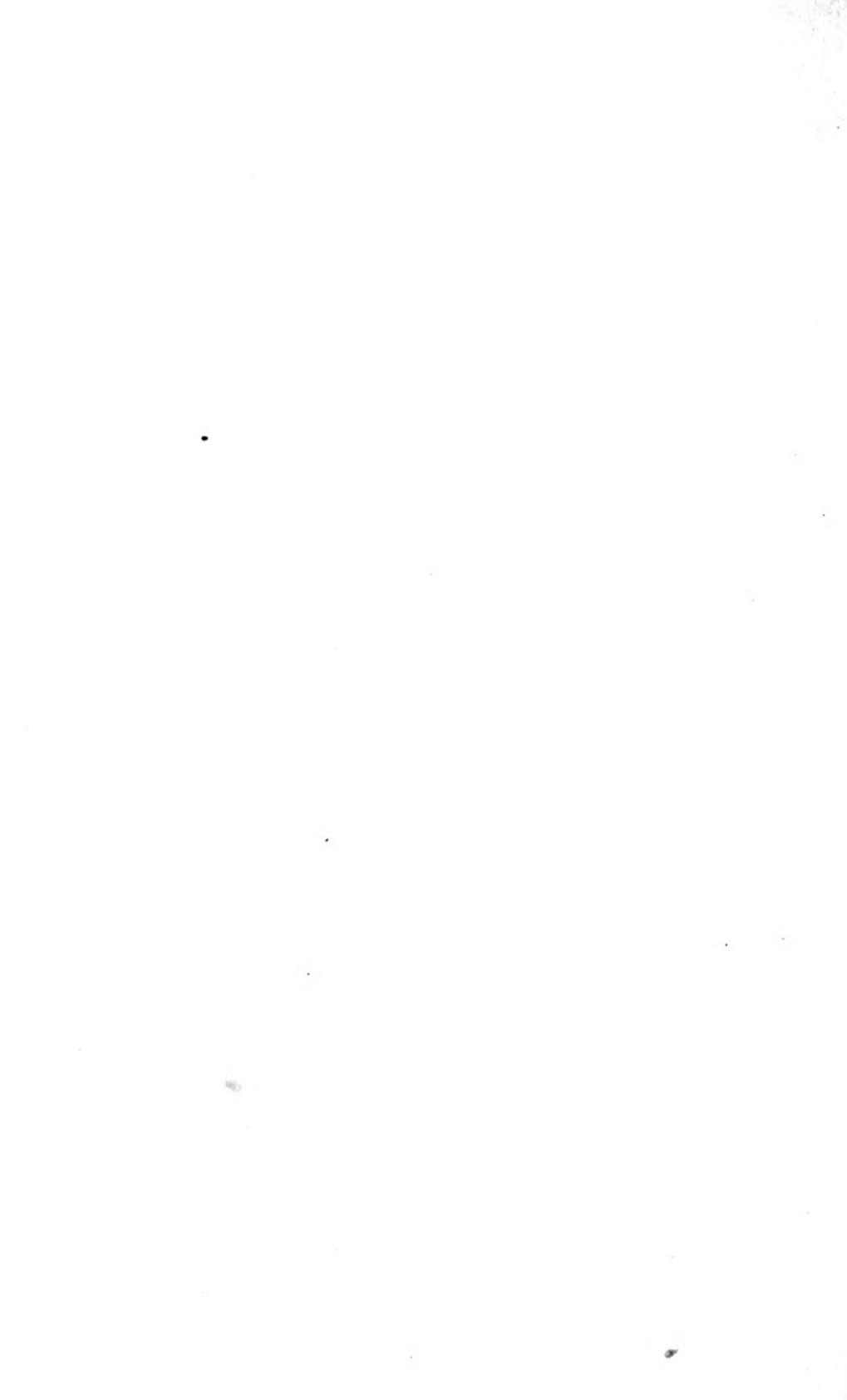
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